

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter One – What If?

February 2005, Palmdale, CA...

“Hey, long time,” Gary said to himself, looking out of his office window when Ron pulled in. “Grab a cup of coffee and come to the office.”

“We really ought to get to a meeting,” Gary told Ron when he plunked down in the extra chair at Gary’s computer desk.

“What’s new?” Ron asked.

“That danged kid of mine volunteered to go to Iraq on a security detail,” Gary explained. “Looks like he’ll be going, too. I asked him if he spoke Syrian, but he told me that everyone else speaks English when you point an M16 at them.”

“What is he, nuts?” Ron asked.

“Hell I don’t know Ron, I guess I just loaded him up too heavy on the patriot stuff,” Gary replied shaking his head. “He told me last night he’d either end up as a squad leader or a team leader over there.”

“I thought he was a gunner on a tank,” Ron replied.

“The Iowa Guard is getting rid of the tanks, partner,” Gary continued. “Some kind of re-organization.”

“What have you been doing to keep busy?” Ron wanted to know.

“What else, writing another story,” Gary smiled. “I killed everyone off in the one I just finished. You still buying guns?”

“Not as often, but yes,” Ron replied. “I have more now than you ever had.”

“Maybe more than I ever had at one time, but if I had every gun I ever owned, I’d have about 5 dozen,” Gary commented.

“Do you have a lot of survival gear?” Ron asked.

“Went through what I could find of it last week and made up a list of what I’m missing,” Gary replied. “I’m going to try filling in later this year if I ever have any money.”

“What are you getting?” Ron asked.

"I'll start with a Mossberg shotgun and then a Mini-14," Gary said. "I'll go to Phoenix and pick up a Butler Creek folding stock, a flash hider and 13 of the 30-round magazines after I get the Mini-14."

"You can get a good price on .223 ammo at Wal-Mart," Ron pointed out.

"I remember," Gary said, "But it's got to be done a little at a time. Sharon is going to rent one of those huge dump things from Waste Management in the spring and have Lorrie's kids clean out the garage and the shed. Then, I'll be able to find the rest of my stuff and I'll have a better idea what I need."

"What do you have?" Ron wanted to know.

"A 10'x14' tent, 2 Coleman stoves, 2 Coleman lanterns, and some other camping gear plus a half dozen cans of Coleman fuel and 2-gallon jugs of kerosene for our lamps," Gary began to tick off his list. "Plus flashlights, batteries, spare bulbs, medical supplies and some basic foodstuffs."

"How long could you last if something bad happened?" Ron asked.

"If I didn't lose electricity, maybe a couple of months," Gary replied. "Otherwise you could cut that in half. I need a portable generator at the top of my list of survival equipment and enough fuel stored to run it for a while. If we bought a chest type freezer to store our meat, I'd only have to run the generator a few times a day. A chest freezer is more energy efficient and usually costs less to buy than an upright freezer of the same size, plus it can store more product per cubic foot of freezer space compared to upright freezers, because there are no shelves required."

"How big a freezer would you get?" Ron asked.

"Maybe a 14 cubic foot, there's just the two of us now," Gary explained. "Wouldn't need too big of a generator either, partner. A 4kw unit would be big enough. I only need it for the refrigerator and freezer and my medical appliances. Lowe's carries the Troy-Bilt generators in the 3.55kw and the 5.55kw sizes."

"How much do you figure it would cost to get yourself 100% squared away?" Ron inquired.

"Maybe \$10 thousand," Gary replied. "That would put us in a position to handle most any emergency for up to about 6 months. And fend off the mutant zombie bikers."

"Huh?"

"That's what some of the writers at Frugal's website call the bad guys in their stories," Gary explained.

"Where would you store everything?" Ron asked next.

"To begin with, we'd reassemble all of the shelving in the garage, Ron," Gary explained. "Then, as funds permitted, we'd replace the shelves with used office supply storage cabinets and anchor them to the walls. I could use one of those as a gun safe, too."

"Where would you store the gas for the generator?" Ron asked.

"I have that shed in the back and it has a window for ventilation, so probably there," Gary replied. "Or, if I can afford a tank on skids, I'd put it next to the building."

"I wouldn't mind doing some of those things myself," Ron said. "I think I'd just put in a propane tank and get the orifices to convert all of my gas appliances to propane. You can rent the propane tanks fairly cheaply."

"You always have to go first class, don't you?" Gary laughed.

"One of those portable generators might not last you for 6 months, Gary," Ron reflected. "You'd be a whole lot better off putting in a residential standby generator and a propane tank."

"They use 1.1 to 2.2gph, Ron," Gary pointed out. "It could take anywhere from 792 to 1,584-gallons of propane a month to keep one of those running. The RS12000 is probably big enough at 11kw."

"Do you know what?" Ron asked. "That RS15000 only uses 1.2 to 2.4gph and you can run your entire home off of it including the air conditioner. That's 864 to 1,728-gallons a month."

"That's right, Ron, but they cost twice as much," Gary said. "We could live without the air conditioner."

"Well, in a perfect world, we wouldn't need any of the stuff anyway," Ron said. "But it just keeps getting worse. Did you hear about Bush recalling our Syrian Ambassador?"

"I heard," Gary replied.

"Why don't Sharon and you refinance the house at a lower interest rate and get yourself enough money to put in all of the things you need?" Ron suggested.

"Now you sound like her," Gary laughed.

"I'm serious Gar-Bear," Ron said. "What would it really cost you to get fully prepared?"

"Well, let's figure it out," Gary replied. "Concrete block wall is about \$35 per foot installed plus a slab and an overhead. If I used the entire backyard as a shelter space, I

could put in a shelter about 40' long and 24' wide. "Figure about \$4,500 for the walls and maybe \$1,250 for the slab and footings. Then, I could put in some of that used 1" steel plate for an overhead supported by an I-beam down the center and seal the whole thing up with a really good coat of tar. The whole shelter could be had for \$10 grand plus the blast door and LUWA air circulation system."

"How much for everything?" Ron asked.

"\$40,000," Gary replied. "But that would even include an armory to protect us against the MZB's."

"And how much propane?" Ron asked.

"A 10,000-gallon tank would give us about 6-months of continuous running time," Gary explained.

"You could have the whole thing done before Derek even leaves for Iraq," Ron said.

(CBS/AP) Groups associated with al Qaeda are at the top of the list of threats to the United States, leading government intelligence officials said Wednesday, saying Iran has emerged as a top threat to American interests in the Middle East.

Despite gains made against al Qaeda, CIA Director Porter Goss, in an unusually blunt statement before the mostly secretive Senate Intelligence Committee, said the terror group is intent on finding ways to circumvent US security enhancements to attack the homeland.

"It may be only a matter of time before al Qaeda or other groups attempt to use chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons. We must focus on that," Goss said.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – "Those jihadists who survive will leave Iraq experienced in and focused on acts of urban terrorism. They represent a potential pool of contacts to build transnational terrorist cells, groups and networks," Goss said.

"The Iraq conflict, while not a cause of extremism, has become a cause for extremists," he said.

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May 2005 Palmdale, CA...

In order to get Sharon to go along with the 'foolishness' as she called it, Gary had to bribe her off. She ended up with a new stove, washer and dryer to go along with their new 14 cu. ft. freezer. He had his 960 square foot shelter that took up almost the entire backyard. He couldn't get an Onan RS12000 or RS15000 generator so had settle for a Kohler 15kw unit. It had been installed in the shelter and was set up to run on propane.

Instead of putting the used office storage cabinets in the garage, they set them and the generator in the shelter before they put in the overhead. By the time it was all said and done, they'd spent every penny of the additional \$50,000 loan on the home. Gary had buried a pair of 2,400-gallon water tanks that were hooked into the city water and a sewage pump to get the waste products out of the shelter.

He'd gotten the package deal from Shane Conner at Radmeters4U plus an extra CD V-717 and CD V-700, some extra Potassium Iodate from Frugal and an extra NukAlert for Sharon's keychain. In the firearms department, he'd added a Remington 870 combo 12-gauge shotgun and a magazine extension in addition to the Mossberg 590A1. He'd also added a Springfield Armory M1A Loaded rifle with a scope. He'd gotten the Mini-14 as he'd planned, it was Sharon's rifle, and a trip to Arizona allowed him to get the rifle fixed up the way he wanted it. He had a M1911A1 and she had a good used Browning Hi-Power. While he was in Arizona, he'd picked up 6 spare 13-round magazines for her Browning and the 21 30-round magazines for the Mini-14. He'd found a source of the T-57 magazines for the M1A and had also loaded up on them.

Ammo wise, he had 5,000 rounds of surplus ammo for each rifle, 250 rounds each of Federal tactical buck and tactical slugs for the shotgun, and 500 rounds of surplus for each of the pistols. He'd also picked up a 9422 rifle, several spare magazines and 20 bricks of .22LR ammo. Since his worst-case scenario only provided for a 6-month disaster, they'd purchased 3 1-year deluxe food supplies from Walton Feed together with a grain mill. They'd gotten 3 1-year supplies (6-months per bed) instead of a single 1-year supply because they weren't sure who would show up to share the shelter if the crap ever hit the fan. The only 'luxury' he'd allowed them was a winch to lower his wheelchair into the shelter. Dr. J had written them a one-time 6-month Rx for all of their prescription medicines and they'd bought those and rotated them with their regular prescriptions.

Meanwhile, Linda's father had passed away and Ron and Linda spent a similar or slightly larger amount. Ron's problem was that he had a swimming pool in his backyard and to put in a shelter, they'd had to demolish the pool, raising his costs. Ron had a slightly larger backyard and his shelter was also slightly larger. Ron and Linda fixed up their shelter to sleep 8 people. Gary and Sharon had only fixed up their shelter to sleep 6. Basically, each shelter had about 160 gross square feet of space per bed, meaning that Ron and Linda's shelter ran about 1,280 square feet.

If the truth were known, Sharon was somewhat less than thrilled descending the 16' ladder to get into the shelter underneath their backyard. That's where that winch came in handy, Gary would get a list of things she wanted out of the shelter storage and he would lower the replacements and winch out the stuff on her list. In this way, they were able to rotate the regular foodstuffs they stored in the shelter. He didn't like heights any better than she did so instead of rungs, the ladder into the shelter had steps. In addition, he'd had Chris fabricate a small platform that he could raise and lower with the winch, permitting him to use it as an elevator for Sharon to get in and out of the shelter.

Since radiation can't turn corners, the entrance to the shelter was at the northwest corner and the descending column was at the northeast corner. There was a 40' long tunnel at the bottom of the ladder that led to the door that opened into the utility room of the shelter and a door from the utility room to the main room of the shelter. Those extra 40' had cost them another \$1,600 counting slab and wall, but it kept the radiation out of the shelter, if there would ever be any radiation to worry about. Gary had a nice little 4-wheel cart he could raise and lower with the winch that he used to transfer things.

"Well, Clarence, what do you think of our preparations?" Gary asked having given Clarence the grand tour.

"I think you wasted a lot of money, my friend," Clarence replied.

"Ron's shelter is slightly bigger and he has room in his shelter for his family plus you and Lucy," Gary responded.

"I can't imagine why we'd ever want to go into a bomb shelter," Clarence half laughed.

"I just hope you're right, Clarence," Gary agreed. "But you know as well as I do that they built those Diablo Canyon reactors on an earthquake fault. Living here in Palmdale is like living on a time bomb. We have the San Andreas Fault about 2 miles south of your house and LA and Edwards AFB are both prime targets in case of World War III."

"I don't know how long we could stay in a shelter, anyway, Gary," Clarence said. "We can't afford to buy a 6-month supply of our prescription drugs."

"Give Ron and I a list of what you take and the two of us will start bugging our doctors and see about putting up a 6-month supply of samples for you," Gary suggested. "You should be bugging the hell out of your doctors for samples, too. With 3 of us working on it, we might be able to have 6-months of samples on hand in 60 days."

It turned out to be 30 days. Clarence and Lucy started rotating their prescriptions and even added a little extra food, just in case.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Two – When, Not If

Monday, July 4, 2005 Palmdale, CA...

Depending upon what their intent was, the best possible time for terrorists to strike was on an American holiday. The reason being, in their collective wisdom, was those were the times when people gathered. Independence Day was one of those holidays where people gathered by the thousands, and in some cases the millions, after dark to watch fireworks displays. It appeared that the United States was considering moving into Syria and possibly Iran and North Korea. Since the North Koreans had announced in February of this year that they had nuclear weapons and were planning on increasing their quantities, the US had slowly been building the number of soldiers stationed in South Korea and Japan.

Military recruiting efforts were at an all-time high and the administration and the Pentagon was extending enlistments for 'the duration'. In fact, nearly 75% of the Guards and Reserves were now on active duty and the training camps were running 24/7 cranking out more soldiers to quell the ongoing insurgence in Iraq. It was more than a little obvious to most people that the United States of America was moving to a full war footing. Bush had introduced legislation in the Congress to increase the number of active Divisions up from 10 to 12. This was seen as something he had perhaps been planning all along, but couldn't introduce until after the November 2004 election. At least, that was what Senator Kerry was now claiming.

The Army maintains four active corps headquarters, 10 active divisions (six heavy and four light), and two active armored cavalry regiments. Light forces – airborne, air assault, and light infantry divisions – are tailored for forcible-entry operations and for operations on restricted terrain, like mountains, jungles, and urban areas. Heavy forces – armored and mechanized divisions equipped with Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, Apache attack helicopters, and the Paladin field artillery system – are trained and equipped for operations against armies employing modern tanks and armored fighting vehicles. Light and heavy forces can operate independently or in combination, providing the mix of combat power needed for specific contingencies. (Thus says the FAS.)

The terrorists planned 2 attacks on July 4, 2005. The first was in New York City with a small nuclear weapon, one of those so-called Russian suitcase nukes that didn't exist, and the second on the other side of the country at a nuclear reactor near Santa Barbara, California. A major fireworks display was planned for New York and while the 1-kiloton bomb wasn't particularly huge, it was salted with materials that had very long half-lives. The similar device to be used in California was hoped to release volumes of materials from the Diablo Canyon reactors. Nuclear weapons can be seen as 'clean' or 'dirty' depending upon how much of what type of radioactive fallout they produce. Some of those isotopes had half-lives of 5,000 years or more.

The detonations were set to coincide precisely at 9:00pm EDT. The two weapons and their sleeper agents had been in the US for a very long time, just waiting for the proper

opportunity to make a lasting impression on the American public. With the apparent buildup of American forces, that time was now. As to how the men and their weapons got into the country, does anyone remember a bunch of terrorists supposedly crossing the Mexican border? They had luggage. Very heavy luggage as it later turned out.

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Hypothetical question: What is the blast radius, e.g., ground zero, for a 1kt nuclear weapon? Is it more than a few hundred yards? That's how close the 2 men were able to get to the 2 Diablo Canyon reactors and plant the bomb. It was on a timer and they were very long gone by the time it went off. The range for blast effects increases significantly with the explosive yield of the weapon. In a typical air burst, these values of overpressure and wind velocity will prevail at a range of 0.7 km for 1 kiloton (Kt) yield; 3.2 km for 100Kt; and 15.0 km for 10 Mt.

As the height of burst for an explosion of given yield is decreased, or as the yield of the explosion for a given height of burst is increased, Mach reflection commences nearer to ground zero and the overpressure near ground zero becomes larger. However, as the height of burst is decreased, the total area of coverage for blast effects is also markedly reduced. The choice of height of burst is largely dependent on the nature of the target. Relatively resistant targets require the concentrated blast of a low altitude or surface burst, while sensitive targets may be damaged by the less severe blast wave from an explosion at a higher altitude. In the latter case a larger area and, therefore, a larger number of targets can be damaged.

A surface burst results in the highest possible overpressures near ground zero. In such a burst, the shock front is hemispherical in form, and essentially all objects are subjected to a blast front similar to that in the Mach region described above. A subsurface burst produces the least air blast, since most of the energy is dissipated in the formation of a crater and the production of a ground shock wave. 700 meters is about 763 yards. The two men had 263 yards left over. A fireball and a blast with at least 20psi would hit the two reactor buildings.

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5:30pm PDT, Palmdale, CA...

"It was about time we got together for a 4th of July celebration," Gary said. "It seems like every other year we could never quite manage to get together. They always have that picnic down at Dick's and then when it gets dark, they do the fireworks thing."

"Are we going down to watch the display at the High School tonight?" Clarence asked.

"It might be fun," Gary replied, "I've never done that before."

“We will have to get there plenty early if we want a seat,” Ron suggested. “They draw a pretty good crowd every year.”

“They were talking back in February about those terrorists attacking one of these days,” Gary pointed out. “I’m sure happy we have these shelters.”

“Gary, there is no way they could ever get a nuclear weapon into the country,” Clarence disagreed.

“Maybe not, but if they ever set one off, I’ll just tell you it’s your imagination,” Gary smiled. “Did everybody get enough to eat?”

“I’m stuffed,” Ron said. “Between eating a steak and two pieces of Lucy’s chicken, I don’t really have room for dessert.”

“Sharon baked a Devil’s food cake,” Gary tempted.

“Maybe a little piece,” Ron agreed.

“How about you Clarence?” Gary asked.

“I’ll take a piece about ½ the size of whatever you cut Ron,” Clarence replied.

“Ok, 1 1-pound slice and 2 ½-pound slices,” Gary agreed, heading for the kitchen.

“Make them all the same size,” Ron hollered.

Gary returned a few minutes later with the 3 slices of cake. As he was setting them on the table, the clock advanced to 6pm.

“Darn, what was that flash in the west?” Gary asked.

“I didn’t see it,” Ron replied, “My back was to the sun.”

“Me neither,” Clarence replied.

Amy and the kids were in the living room waiting for the fireworks to begin in New York City. She came rushing out of the house and said, “You guys had better get in here, something’s wrong in New York.”

“What’s wrong in New York?” Gary asked.

“They lost the live feed and the EAS tone is sounding,” Amy replied.

“You don’t suppose...” Gary started to say. “Let’s go check it out, it might be trouble.”

“...take you live to President Bush from his ranch in Crawford, Texas,” the announcer was saying.

The picture cut to a confused looking President George Bush who was being advised by several people and holding a piece of paper. Bush ignored the live camera feed and continued to consult with his advisors. The Three Amigos were sitting there eating their cake when another person handed Bush a second piece of paper. Bush got a look of disbelief on his face and apparently asked the person if they were certain. That advisor shrugged his shoulder and nodded.

“My fellow Americans,” Bush began. *“Just minutes ago a nuclear weapon was detonated in New York City at approximately 9pm. I am also advised that at the same time a second weapon was detonated at the Diablo Canyon nuclear reactors. I urge everyone...”*

“Oh chit,” Gary said neatly summarizing everyone’s immediate reaction.

“We have a while before it gets here, Gar-Bear,” Ron pointed out.

“Is this the part where we are supposed to decide who to let into our shelters and who to shoot?” Gary asked.

“Say we cut it to 40 feet per person,” Ron suggested, “How many do you have room for?”

“960 divided by 40 is 24,” Gary replied.

“1,280 divided by 40 is 32,” Ron said. “How many extra people can you take?”

“There’re Sharon and me and Amy and her 2 kids plus Lorrie and David and their 5 kids,” Gary replied. “That makes 12, so we can take up to 12 more people at 40 feet per person. I suppose we could take Chris and Patti and their kids plus Clarence and Lucy. That would get us up to 18 people.”

“Let’s go down to the celebration and find out how many people are there,” Ron suggested. “I’ll get Linda to call John and see how many people are at our house.”

At Dick’s house, there turned out to be Dick and his son, Jason, plus Dick’s daughter Tracy, her husband and 4 children. Chris and Patti were there with their 2 kids and Dave Lucky was there with his 2 daughters. There were some other neighbors who Gary didn’t know plus Darlene Jones and her daughter and son. Gary quickly summarized what they had just heard on TV and asked everyone to come down to Sharon’s and his house so they could figure out how to divide people between the two available shelters.

Counting Chris and Patti and their 2 kids plus Dick and his family and Darlene and her 2 kids, plus the other neighbors who were gathered for the party on Dick's front lawn, there were about 18 adults and children who came over to Gary and Sharon's house, making for a total of 30 people including Ron and Linda and Clarence and Lucy. Clarence had used Gary's second phone line to call his sister and his 2 kids. That accounted for an additional 8 people including his sister, his 2 sons and their wives and their 3 grandchildren.

In addition to John, Kevin and Brenda, which brought the total to 41, there were 15 people at Ron's house who knew about his shelter and were looking for admittance. 56 people and 960+1,280 square feet of space came out to 40 square feet per person. Meaning that Gary was providing shelter for 24 and Ron for 32. After that, the guns might have to come out. They decided it would be better for Clarence's family to be together at Ron's. Gary added Dick, Jason, Tracy and her husband and 4 kids to his total and everyone else headed to Ron and Linda's. ($18-2+8=24$)

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Three – 343 Hours

For every seven times older the fallout becomes, it has also decayed to $\frac{1}{10}$ th of its strength. So, 90% of the gamma radiation is gone after the first 7 hours. Then, 90% of that remaining 10 percent is largely gone after two days. This is the ‘good news’ and why prompt sheltering is both effective and viable and should be seriously explored and embraced by all.

Protection from external radiation, primarily gamma radiation in fallout, is provided by three factors:

Time: Effectively minimizing your exposure time and also ‘waiting out’ the natural decay of the fallout in a safe shelter.

Distance: Effectively maximizing your distance from the fallout, as the inverse square law applies here to distance. (When you double the distance between you and the fallout, you have decreased its intensity by a factor of four.)

Shielding: Effectively maximizing the amount of radiation absorbing material between you and the radiation source.

Ron and Gary’s shelters had 8’ of compacted earth and an inch of steel. They could have survived very close to a 1kt blast. In the period of $7 \times 7 \times 7 = 343$ hours, the outside radiation level should be $\frac{1}{1000}$ th of the initial fallout level. 343 hours is 14 days and 7 hours. It’s what you use when you don’t have a survey meter or Geiger counter. But the men had 3 survey meters each and 3 dosimeters for the people who left the shelter after $\sim 14\frac{1}{3}$ days. The CD V-717 sensor was mounted at ground level so they knew exactly how much radiation was outside of the shelters. The approximate distance from Diablo Canyon to Palmdale is 155 miles (250km) (135nm) on a heading of 104°. There was no radiation danger after 49 hours. So, they went outside and used the CD V-715 and CD V-700 to verify that it was safe to leave the shelter. They had lots of Potassium Iodate so as a precaution, it was passed out. Nobody seemed a bit disturbed when they were asked to reimburse old Gar-Bear for the bottles of pills.

It had been pretty hot on the 4th of July and when that blast took Diablo Canyon down, it caused a ripple effect and brought the grid down in most of southern California. This forced the shutdown of the reactors at San Onofre simply as a precaution. When they emerged from the shelters on July 12th, the power was still down. It all seemed like a pretty tame little adventure. Even the phones still worked. Both Ron and Gary vowed never again would they cram so many people into those shelters. They also assumed that the crisis was over. The cake, in case you’re wondering, was the first thing anybody ate.

Having written a story that had discussed a backyard shelter, Gary and Ron had included some of the suggestions the Squirrels at Frugal’s had offered. For example, even though the shelter had an ambient temperate in the mid 50’s they added an air condi-

tioner that pulled air from the utility room into the main room. With a population density of one person per 40 square feet, it hadn't taken the shelter too long to heat up. They kept their shelters cool and passed out the deodorant. Plus, right from the beginning, they knew it couldn't be all that bad, the TV stayed on the air. New York City hadn't fared so well. Many people died there on the night of Independence Day.

Bush had made it back to Washington and Congress had convened in extraordinary session. The problem was, until the FBI or whoever caught the bad guys, the President and the Congress had no idea who exactly to blame. They didn't know if this was the work of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri or some new player on the scene. As a matter of fact, they didn't know squat. The upside of a nuclear weapon, at least from a terrorist's point of view, is that it gets rid of the fingerprints. Washington was mad as hell, but they didn't know whom to blame. And, all of a sudden the events of 9/11/01 seemed to pale by comparison.

Having forced George Tenet out of office, Congress decided to focus the blame on FBI Director Robert Mueller. It had to be someone's fault and Mueller had gotten a pass on the 9/11 attacks because they happened the first week he was in office. Obviously, the assumption was that you weren't qualified to lead either the CIA or the FBI unless you were a mind reader. The new DCI got the pass this time. You know how it is; it is always somebody else's fault. They couldn't blame the actual terrorists because no one knew which terrorists had done it this time.

The one thing the Congress did do was approve increasing the standing Army Divisions from 10 to 12 and slightly increasing the number of authorized Reserve and Guard units. Bush didn't ask for it, but he signed the authorization bill rather quickly. A few days later, he proposed to offer incentives in the form of promotions to Guardsmen and Reservists who would return to active duty for a period of four years. Gary got an email from Derek a few days later indicating that he was taking up the offer and getting a promotion to staff sergeant. His friend Bill wasn't going to go on fulltime active duty because the longest he'd been able to hang on to E-5 had been the 2 weeks before the Silver Star incident.

"Things just went from bad to worse," Gary told Ron the following day. "That idiot kid of mine is going to take up Bush on those promotions he offered for people going back on active duty for 4 years."

"So, is he still in Iraq?" Ron asked.

"He didn't say in the email, but I assume so," Gary replied. "I'll have to tell you Ron, I don't like where I think things are heading."

"Oh, where are they headed?" Ron asked.

"Did you see the bit in the Washington Times about our build up in Japan and South Korea?" Gary asked.

“Nope. When did you start reading that paper?” Ron asked.

“About the time I figured out that the Post was part of the clique that included the New York Times, the LA Times and CNN,” Gary explained. “Maybe a year or so back, I can’t really remember.”

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Sunday, July 31, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

“Darn it’s hot,” Ron said. “Anyone have any idea how much longer it’s going to be before they get the electricity back on?”

“We could see about converting those generators to run on natural gas, you know,” Gary explained. “I went to the Kohler website and they have an automatic changeover system that switches from natural gas to LP Vapor on some of their units. Maybe we ought to see about putting something like that on our units or trade in these units for the unit that already has the automatic changeover.”

“Are they the residential standby generators?” Ron asked.

“No, but I’ll bet we can figure something out,” Gary said. “The only thing is, natural gas units produce less power than LP units so we might have to up size a little.”

“Get more information on it and we’ll see,” Ron suggested. “Now what are we going to do if we have to use those shelters again? I’m NOT putting any 32 flippin’ people in my shelter.”

“Hell, Ron, I don’t have any idea, to be honest,” Gary replied. “But, I’d have to agree that 9-10 people would be about the maximum I’d want in my shelter and maybe 12-13 people would be the most you’d want in yours. It started to get pretty close after 3-4 days.”

“Let’s say 22 people then,” Ron suggested. “Your family is 12 people and mine is 5. Adding in Clarence’s group gets us to 27. We’re short of space any way you look at it. We’re going to have to work on Clarence to put in his own shelter.”

“Well if I were to put my 12 in my shelter, it would work out to 80 square feet a head,” Gary said. “You have 1,280 and at 80 feet per, you could handle 16 people. That would let you handle your 5 and Clarence’s 10.”

“We could maybe handle that and even one more person,” Ron agreed. “Check on those generators and let me know. Also if we’re going to have to change units, see if we’d be better off making a private sale on the ones we have. I’d bet dimes to donuts we can get back everything we have in them and maybe a little more if they don’t get the power back on soon.”

Monday, August 1, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

You know, some people could fall into a pile of s... and come out smelling like a rose. Ron got on the phone to Kohler Power Systems and explained what he wanted. They recommended their model 20RZ. It could be fitted with the automatic changeover and everything he was looking for. Ron and Linda were more than a little flush because of her father dying and Ron talked it over with Linda and they ordered 3 units, one for each of the amigos.

"Forget it, partner, I have 3 new generators being shipped," Ron said. "There's one for each of us. You can pay me back when you sell you old generator and I work something out with Clarence."

"How big are they?" Gary asked.

"20kw with automatic switchover from natural gas to LP Vapor," Ron explained. "Got distributor pricing by buying 3 at one time."

"You should have bought more, you'd get rich," Gary suggested.

"That's all they had on hand, Gar-Bear or I might have done just that," Ron chuckled.

"How are we going to switch them out?" Gary asked.

"Dig down to the plate over the utility room, remove one plate section and make the switch," Ron explained.

"Well hell, if I'm going to have to dig up my back yard, I'm going to expand the size of my shelter," Gary smiled. "I can add 10' to the length and 6' to the width. It will go to 50'x30' and give me 1,500 square feet of space. That will give us room for Chris and Patti and their kids."

"How's that going to work?" Ron asked.

"I get the contractor to knock out the south wall and the east wall and lengthen the north and west walls," Gary explained.

"Someone die and leave you some money I don't know about?" Ron asked.

"In a manner of speaking, yes," Gary laughed. "I got on the phone to the banker in Iowa and explained how I needed a standby generator for my medical equipment because of the power outage. He fussed and fumed, but he said under the circumstances, they'd give me enough to put in a full system. I told him they were commanding a premium price because of the power outage and he said he'd get me \$10 thousand. Between that money and replacing the alternator in my 15kw, I can expand the shelter."

“Lyn and I talked it over and we’re going to front Clarence the money to put in his own shelter,” Ron said. “If I know Clarence half as well as I think I do, he’ll bust his butt paying us back.”

Monday, September 5, 2005, Palmdale, CA... Labor Day...

“I had a call from Sandy on Saturday,” Ron was explaining. “She came by some rifles that she’s holding for me. You both be ready tomorrow and we go see about buying them.”

“What are they?” Clarence asked.

“Used Beretta BM59’s,” Ron replied.

“Never heard of that one, Gary said. “What the hell is it?”

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Four – New Weapons & Communications

“Good morning guys,” Sandy said, “Why don’t you step into the back room?”

“What’s a Beretta BM59?” Gary asked.

“Read this page I printed off the web, it will explain everything,” Sandy said.

Caliber: 7.62×51 mm NATO (7.62 Winchester)

Action: Gas operated, rotating bolt

Overall length: 1095 mm

Barrel length: 491 mm

Weight: 4.4 kg empty

Rate of fire: 750 rounds per minute

Magazine capacity: 20 rounds

Since the end of the World War 2, Italy adopted the US-designed M1 Garand rifle in .30-06 (7.62x63mm) and manufactured it under license. This semi-automatic rifle proved itself very well during WW2 but in the late 1950s it was seriously outdated and obsolete, so Italian military wanted a new rifle, chambered for the NATO-standard cartridge, 7.62×51mm. The most cost-efficient way to build a new rifle was to redesign the old good M1, and this was done by Pietro Beretta SPA. New gun, designated as Beretta BM59, was adopted in 1959 and served with Italian, Indonesian and Moroccan armies. It should be noted that earliest BM59s were manufactured from available M1 parts, including re-chambered barrels. In the late 1980s BM59 was replaced in Italian service with Beretta AR70/90 assault rifles.

Basically, the BM59 can be described as re-chambered M1 Garand, with addition of the removable 20-round magazine and select fire trigger. Another addition was a flash-hider of NATO-standard diameter, which also served as a rifle grenade launcher. To launch grenades, one must turn on a gas cut-off valve by raising grenade front sight, mounted on the gas block. If it is not done, the excessive gas pressure will damage the rifle. BM59 is a gas-operated rifle, with gas chamber and gas piston located under the barrel. Chamber locks by the rotating bolt with two massive lugs. Fire mode selector/safety switch is located at the front of the trigger guard, charging handle is attached to the gas rod and reciprocates during the fire cycle.

BM59 was available in 4 modifications:

- BM59 Mark I had a wooden stock with semi-pistol grip.
- BM59 Mark II had a wooden stock with pistol grip to achieve a better control during the full-auto fire;
- BM59 Mark III, or Ital TA, was a gun with a pistol grip and a metallic folding buttstock, and was intended for Mountain troops; BM59 Para was similar to BM59 Ital TA but had shorter barrel and shorter flash-hider, and was intended for paratroopers.
- BM59 Mark IV, had a heavier barrel and plastic stock, and was used as a light squad automatic weapon.

“Which model do you have?” Ron asked.

“The Mark II’s,” Sandy replied. “They are practically new and I managed to get a total of 200 magazines for the 10 rifles.”

“These have to be totally illegal in California,” Ron pointed out.

“That’s right, Ron, I thought I was getting the civilian model of the rifle and I ended up with those Mark II’s.” Sandy explained.

“So what’s the deal?” Clarence asked.

“The deal is you take all 10 rifles and the magazines for 10% over my cost and get them the hell out of my store before some ATF agent shows up and I lose my license,” Sandy said.

Ron wrote a check and Sandy said she’d work out something on the paperwork. They didn’t ask and she didn’t tell. Ron also bought 21 cases of the 7.62x51mm Aussie surplus, all she had in stock. She let that go for \$135 per 800-round case.

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“I’d say we’re set for WW III,” Gary laughed. “These are pretty nice rifles. Full auto, too. I wonder if they could be adapted to accept the Shadow suppressors?”

“I’ll ask Sandy one of these days,” Ron replied. “If she can get them for us, they’ll be completely off the books, just like these rifles.”

“I surely do appreciate you helping Lucy and me put in that shelter, Ron,” Clarence said. “Now I have the start of an armory to go with my shotgun and .38 revolver.”

“While I had my backyard all dug up, I made my shelter the same size as the two of yours,” Ron commented. “Among the 3 of us, we have 4,500 square feet of space.”

“Did you pass the Technicians exam?” Gary asked.

“Barely,” Ron admitted. “My memory isn’t as good as yours.”

“How about you Clarence?” Ron asked.

“I got a good memory, Ronald,” Clarence smiled, “I passed with flying colors.”

“Here’s a check for the rifles and ammo, Ron,” Gary said. “That finishes off the ten grand from the bank including what I saved by upgrading my generator. I got Dick to help me install a flexible natural gas line to my shelter. What did you guys do?”

"I got Dick to do the same for Clarence and me," Ron said. "He also helped me to get ready for the Technicians license test. What do you recommend we put in for a radio?"

"I'd go for the Kenwood TS-2000X, Ron," Gary replied. "You'll have all of the frequencies in a single radio. The secret is in the antenna, not the radio anyway."

"Where should we get those?" Ron asked.

"Same place I got mine," Gary said. "AES in Vegas."

"What about the antennas?" Ron asked.

"Let's make a trip up to Visalia and check with the folks at US Tower Corporation," Gary suggested. "They have a MA-850 tubular tower with a minimum height of 24' and a maximum height of 85'. That's what I have set up."

"What did you use for antennas, Gar-Bear?" Clarence asked.

"I have a Cushcraft R8, Multiband vertical, a Diamond X6000A, and a Diamond D-130J for my receiver," Gary replied. "I generally keep the mast in the lowered position because of the neighbors."

"What about CB radios?" Ron asked.

"So give us each one," Gary laughed. "You have a box full in your garage."

"They're all mobiles," Ron said.

"We'll get power supplies," Gary countered.

"What do we want in our vehicles?" Clarence asked.

"If Ron has enough CBs, one of those plus an Icom IC-706MkIIIG," Gary replied. "You need 3 antennas on your vehicle, one for CB, a second for HF and 6 meters and a third for 2 meters and 70 cm."

"The cars will look like cop cars with that many antennas," Ron laughed.

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Thursday, September 15, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

"We can't use the 80-meter band with that R8," Ron complained.

"Sure you can, put in an antenna turner," Gary suggested. "It will get you by."

“Dang it, Gary,” Clarence complained, “I already feel like I owe my soul to the company store.”

“Nobody is pushing you to pay the money back, Clarence,” Ron said.

“I don’t like owing anybody Ron, especially a friend,” Clarence replied.

Just then, the doorbell rang and Gary went to see who was at the door. It was 2 guys in uniform. “Crap,” Gary thought.

“Mr. Olsen?” the officer asked.

“Yes, come in,” Gary replied. “That boy of mine get himself killed, did he?”

“No sir, but he’s hurt pretty badly,” the officer replied. “They transferred him to a hospital in the Washington DC area.”

“He going to make it?” Gary asked.

“Yes, but he’s out of the Army for good, I’m afraid,” the officer replied.

“Coffee?” Gary asked.

“We don’t want to impose,” the officer replied.

“It would be an imposition if you didn’t join my friends and me for a cup of coffee,” Gary half raised his voice.

“In that case,” the Captain said, “Sure, why not?”

“What happened to Derek?” Gary asked.

“What happened is he got lucky,” the Captain explained. “They had just installed the up armor package on the truck the day before. They got hit with an IED and your boy was wearing his spalling gear under his Interceptor body armor. He and a buddy of his were the only 2 men to survive.”

“His buddy named Bill?” Gary asked.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t have the other name,” the Captain replied. “We can get you a hop to Washington on a C-130 if you’d like.”

“I appreciate the offer, Captain,” Gary replied, “But I’ll have to pass. If you get me anywhere near Washington, I’d had to take a shot at good ol’ Dubya for getting my boy in that mess in the first place. Are we going to end up going to war with Syria and Iran?”

“You didn’t hear it from me,” the Captain replied, “But you left off North Korea.”

“They let me bring a rifle on the plane?” Gary asked.

“No sir,” the Captain replied. “No weapons on military aircraft.”

“Jeezus H, did you say North Korea, too?” Ron asked.

“You didn’t hear that from me, remember?” the Captain smiled, “But you heard right.”

“Gary, you’re going to have to excuse Clarence and me,” Ron announced. “He and I are going over to my house and call Walton Feed. Will a 1-year deluxe supply fill you in?”

“And then some, partner,” Gary replied. “So tell me Captain, how badly was Derek hurt?”

“Nice to meet you gentlemen,” the Captain called to Ron and Clarence. “Sorry about the circumstances. Mr. Olsen, Derek took a lot of shrapnel and he’s banged up pretty badly. But, that extra layer of protection provided by his spalling gear saved his butt. He has some muscle damage to his right arm and leg and that is why they’re busting him out of the service. He’s going to need quite a bit of physical therapy, but he should be ok, eventually. Here’s the phone number if you want to call him and talk to him.”

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“Hullo...”

“Forget to duck, did you?” Gary asked.

“I didn’t have a chance,” Derek replied. “The lights went out and I woke up in Germany on my way home.”

“We’re headed for a war, Derek,” Gary said. “If it’s ok with you, I’m going to move Mary and the kids and Damon and his kids out to California. I have a big bomb shelter and all kinds of supplies. It shouldn’t make any difference to you where you live and work, should it? You’re going to be out of the military for good.”

“Circling the wagons?” Derek asked.

“Now that you mention it, yes,” Gary replied.

“I’ll call her, Dad, it will be better coming from me,” Derek explained.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Five – A Too Small House

Friday, September 30, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

“How did you get her to give you the kids, Damon?” Gary asked.

“I signed over ½ of my share of the trust,” Damon said.

“I’m surprised she didn’t want the whole thing,” Gary commented.

“She did, Dad, but you know the old joke, right?” Damon asked

“Which one?” Gary inquired.

“Would you sleep with me for a million dollars?” Damon started.

“And she said yes, so he asked if she’d sleep with him for a quarter. She gets indignant and asks, ‘What do you think I am?’ and he replies, ‘We’ve already established that, we’re just discussing the price.’” Gary completed.

“That’s the one,” Damon chuckled. “Mutt had a price, but it won’t do her any good because the will says that no one can encumber that Trust Fund.”

“Where did you tell her you were going?” Gary asked.

“I told her that the kids and I were moving to Texas,” Damon replied.

“She’ll call here looking after she talks to Matt,” Gary said.

“Just tell her I called and told you the same thing and you don’t know where I am,” Damon suggested. “Where are we going to live?”

“We’ll get you an apartment down on Avenue R near downtown,” Gary replied. “It’s not too hot of a neighborhood, but you can afford the rent. You might try contacting Falconer Insulation about a job.”

“Mary told me she had an offer on Mom’s house,” Damon continued. “It’s enough to pay off the loans and pay the realtor’s commission. I sure hate to see the house go.”

“It’s time to move on Damon, your mother has been dead for several years now,” Gary replied gently.

“Yeah,” Damon sighed, “I guess.”

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“Hello?”

“Hey uglier than me I just got off the phone with Sandy,” Ron announced over the phone.

“What did she know?” Gary asked.

“The flashhider on the BM59 is standard NATO so it will take the quick detach mount for the Shadow suppressors,” Ron replied.

“Now all we need is a dozen of the suppressors,” Gary said. “Ten for the BM59’s and one each for your and my M1A’s.”

“Well, not exactly, Gar-Bear,” Ron chuckled, “All we need to do is install the quick detach mounts on the rifles.”

“What’s the deal? She’s not a class III dealer.” Gary asked.

“She referred me to a third party and I paid cash,” Ron said. “You owe me \$2,800 when you get it. I’ll bring them by later today and you can figure out how to install them. It isn’t all that hard, I already have my 5 installed. And, they’re not Shadows, they’re Surefires.

“Yeah, ok Ron,” Gary agreed. “Damon told me that Mary had an offer on their house back in Huxley.”

“So, what now?” Ron asked.

“I called Derek and he has the stitches out,” Gary explained. “He said that they’re going to set him up with additional physical therapy here in the Antelope Valley. He’s supposed to fly out of Washington next week and pick up Mary and the kids and then they’re flying to California. He ended up with an 80% disability.”

“That’s not too bad,” Ron said.

“They started at 40% but he got the VA involved from the beginning and they raised it rather than fight,” Gary continued. “I don’t believe he’s really 80% disabled but he said that until he gets done with physical therapy, it will be 100% and then cut back to 80%.”

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Sunday, October 16, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

“You don’t look so bad for someone who was blown up by an IED,” Gary grinned.

“I have lots of new scars, Dad,” Derek replied. “What’s the program here? Where are we going to live?”

“There is that low income housing 2 blocks down the street and I confirmed that you and Mary are qualified,” Gary explained. “How did you manage to get DJ away from Junior?”

“That was a funny deal, I don’t really know,” Derek replied. “DJ said he wanted to come to California with me and Junior said ok.”

“I guess since he’s 12 he should be able to make up his own mind,” Gary observed. “Did the Army move your furniture?”

“Are you kidding?” Derek replied, “Uncle Jerry and Grandma paid to have it moved.”

“Damon had to buy his kids from Mutt,” Gary said.

“He told me,” Derek replied. “How did that end up?”

“I called the bank and they put the lawyer on it and broke the agreement,” Gary said. “Apparently the only way Damon could do anything with his share was through a will. Anyway, we’ll put you guys up in a motel for tonight and you can rent an apartment tomorrow. They are holding one for you and Mary.”

“So is Mutt going to try and get the kids back?” Derek asked.

“I don’t think so, Derek,” Gary replied. “She legally relinquished custody for a consideration and it’s just too dang bad the consideration wasn’t worth anything. Of course you know Damon, he swears up and down that he didn’t know that he lacked the capacity to enter into the contract so I guess there’s no provable fraud involved. Leastwise, that what the bank’s lawyer told her.”

“So, where’s this shelter of yours?” Derek asked.

“Look out the window and tell me what you see,” Gary suggested.

“A communications tower and a big assed propane tank is all I see,” Derek replied looking out the kitchen window.

“That’s all you’re supposed to see,” Gary laughed. “Come with me.”

Gary showed Derek that by raising the flower box attached to the lid of the blast door, he opened the vertical shaft to the shelter. They made their way downstairs and Gary showed Derek his new improved 1,500 square foot shelter. Then, Gary went to the Armory in the utility room and got out one of the Beretta BM59’s.

“Ever see one of those before?” Gary asked.

“Saw one once, but never handled one,” Derek said examining the rifle.

“That one is yours, but I’d keep the suppressor off if I were you,” Gary said. “Unless you need to use the rifle. And don’t ask, it’s completely illegal and both the rifle and suppressor are off the books. I’ll give you 20 magazines and 800 rounds of ammo. You always wanted a Glock 21, didn’t you?”

“Yes, you know I did,” Derek replied.

“Here you go,” Gary said. “Those 5 magazines are the 13 rounder’s. Now, that’s the end of my gratitude for your being alive, so don’t ask for anything else. Everything you have is illegal except the Glock 21 itself. If you want a legal magazine, you’ll have to buy it.”

“You know we’re going to war, don’t you?” Derek asked.

“We sort of figured we were,” Gary replied. “That’s why we’re circling the wagons. Clarence’s boys both live here in Palmdale and Ron is working on getting his 2 daughters to move here. He has a daughter in Ft. Smith, Arkansas and another in Austin, Minnesota.”

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Monday, October 31, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

“Mark and Paula are leaving today, partner,” Ron said. “He somehow managed to talk Hormel into transferring him to California.”

“What about Jennifer and Bobby Joe?” Gary asked.

“They said they wouldn’t come until they sold the house,” Ron explained. “So Lyn and I bought the house and put it on the market ourselves. I’ll probably take a bath on the deal, but hell, it’s only Linda’s inheritance, what do I care?”

“So are they on the way or what?” Gary asked.

“Bobby Joe is driving their furniture out in a rental truck and Jennifer and the kids are flying in this afternoon,” Ron said. “Bobby Joe should be here by Wednesday night or early Thursday.”

“What about Robert?” Gary asked.

“He says that he’s safe right where he’s at,” Ron replied. “Cedar Hill is only 6 miles from the Colorado border.”

“I wonder how much longer this war is going to hold off.” Gary asked.

“Not for very darn long, partner,” Ron said.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – In addition to terrorist groups, Goss also pointed to threats posed by a nuclear-armed North Korea and an Islamic regime in Iran that US officials fear is seeking nuclear weapons.

A week after Pyongyang for the first time said explicitly it has nuclear weapons, Goss underscored North Korea's ability to field effective long-range missiles.

"We assess the TD-2 is capable of reaching the United States with a nuclear weapon-sized payload," he told the senators in reference to a North Korean missile.

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Even as Ron and Gary were visiting, North Koreans were pouring over the 38th parallel. Derek, who had put in 13 months in Korea back in the 1994-95 time frame, came to them with the news. The US, according to Derek, was already scrambling to move up troops from Japan. In addition to the Kitty Hawk, based in Yokosuka, the Vinson and Truman were steaming to Korea and Lincoln, Kennedy and Reagan were getting ready to put to sea. Derek went on to say that as a precaution, the DHS had gone to Orange and the military was at DEFCON 3.

Ron got on the phone and told Linda that she should get Jennifer and the kids at LAX and get back to Palmdale as fast as possible because TSHTF. Next, he tried to reach Bobby Joe's cell phone without success. Finally, he contacted Paula and Mark and Paula said that they were going to drive straight through. Ron no more than hung up than Brenda called to say that Bobby Joe had called and he was also going to try and drive straight through. Ron told Gary that he was going home but he'd be right by the phone if Gary needed anything. Gary asked Derek to go get Damon's kids and bring them back to the house. They should leave Damon a note and tell him to come there for supper. After Derek had the kids at the house, Gary told him to get his family and 'bring his things'.

...launched missiles on Israel a short time ago. The Patriot III batteries failed to bring down the missile targeted for Tel Aviv and a 200kt bomb all but destroyed the city, Wolf Blitzer was saying. Israel launched Jericho III missiles deployed near Sedot Mikha in the Judean foothills (about 23 km east of Jerusalem and about 40 km southeast of Tel Aviv) against several Iranian targets. While it is not known at this time if the Israeli missiles are nuclear tipped, sources tell CNN that it is highly probable that they are carrying nuclear warheads up to the 500kt range. In Japan, the Defense Forces are on full alert against a possible attack from North Korea. Both China and the Russian Federation have also raised their alert statuses, but we have little information at this time. CNN believes that these actions were purely defensive in nature.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Six – Heating Up

“What did you think when you heard I was hurt?” Derek asked.

“They sent a Sergeant and a Captain and I was afraid you were dead,” Gary admitted. “When I found out you were hurt but going to live, I was so relieved that I actually took it fairly calmly. But, if you had gotten yourself killed, I’d have really been po’d. I told you that when you volunteered. Just seeing those 2 guys probably cost me 10 years off my life. The rule is that parents are supposed to die before their kids.”

“If I would have been dead,” Derek said, “They would have sent 2 officers, one of them a Chaplin.”

“I guess that I must have known that all along,” Gary replied. “Tell me about North and South Korea.”

“An independent kingdom under Chinese suzerainty for most of the past millennium, Korea was occupied by Japan in 1905 following the Russo-Japanese War; five years later, Japan formally annexed the entire peninsula. Following World War II, Korea was split, with the northern half coming under Soviet-sponsored Communist domination. US and other UN forces intervened to defend South Korea from North Korean attacks supported by the Chinese in 1950. After failing in the Korean War (1950-53) to conquer the US-backed republic in the southern portion by force, an armistice was signed in 1953, splitting the peninsula along a demilitarized zone at about the 38th parallel.

“North Korea under its founder President Kim Il-sung adopted a policy of ostensible diplomatic and economic “self-reliance” as a check against excessive Soviet or Communist Chinese influence and molded political, economic, and military policies around the core ideological objective of eventual unification of Korea under Pyongyang’s control.

“After the armistice, South Korea achieved rapid economic growth with per capita income rising to roughly 18 times the level of North Korea. In 1987, South Korean voters elected ROH Tae-woo to the presidency, ending 26 years of military dictatorships. South Korea today is a fully functioning modern democracy. In June 2000, a historic first North-South summit took place between the South’s President Kim Tae-chung and the North’s leader Kim Jong-il.

“Kim’s son, the current ruler Kim Jong-il, was officially designated as Kim’s future successor in 1980 and assumed a growing political and managerial role until his father’s death in 1994, when he assumed full power without opposition. After decades of economic mismanagement and resource misallocation, the North since the mid-1990s has relied heavily on international food aid to feed its population while continuing to expend resources to maintain an army of about 1 million.

“North Korea’s long-range missile development and research into nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and massive conventional armed forces are of major concern to

the international community. In December 2002, following revelations it was pursuing a nuclear weapons program based on enriched uranium in violation of a 1994 agreement with the United States to freeze and ultimately dismantle its existing plutonium-based program, North Korea expelled monitors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and in January 2003 declared its withdrawal from the international Non-Proliferation Treaty. In mid-2003 Pyongyang announced it had completed the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel rods (to extract weapons-grade plutonium) and was developing a 'nuclear deterrent.' Since August 2003 North Korea has participated in six-party talks with the United States, China, South Korea, Japan, and Russia to resolve the stalemate over its nuclear programs."

"How big is South Korea's military?" Gary asked.

"Not big enough," Derek replied. "The army consists of the Army Headquarters, the three army commands, the Aviation Command, and the Special Warfare Command. The army possesses component units including 11 corps, 49 divisions, and 19 brigades, some 560,000 troops, some 2,360 tanks, 5,180 pieces of field artillery, and 2,400 armored vehicles. But the ROK has the K1 and the K1A1 tanks while North Korea only has the Soviet T-62's. Personally, I believe that North Korea screwed the pooch. To execute the US 'win-win strategy' and support the United Nations Command (UNC) and ROK-US Combined Forces Command (CFC) operation plans, the US augmentation forces deployment plan on the Korean peninsula is set at all times.

"This plan mainly includes in-Korea forces, pre-planned time-phased deployment forces, augmentation forces, and foreign support forces. The plan centers on the forces under the US Pacific Command, and part of the forces from the US and other theaters are included as well. The size of the US augmentation forces, which include ground, naval, air and marine forces, will amount to at least 640 thousand troops, and these forces possess fighters, support aircraft, and aircraft carrier battle groups and amphibious flotillas equipped with the latest fighters. Now that a crisis has occurred on the Korean peninsula, the US augmentation forces units will be deployed after the approval of the National Supreme Command and under the command of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. After deployment, the augmentation forces will go through the process of unit integration, and then be committed to specific operations."

Derek, as you could see, was well versed on the state of the military in North and South Korea. What the North Koreans had over the South Koreans was manpower. Conversely, the South Koreans had superior equipment and the whole darn American Fleet. That was why, I suppose, North Korea had insisted on having a nuclear program. It remained to be seen if they'd actually be stupid enough to use those weapons they supposedly had. Maybe the Kitty Hawk had nuclear weapons aboard and maybe it didn't. Japan had objected to any nuclear weapons in any of its ports. On the other hand, the Vinson and Truman were steaming to Korea and Lincoln, Kennedy and Reagan were getting ready to put to sea. You could dang well count on them having nukes aboard, even if they denied it. And there were those 18 Ohio class boats, 4 labeled SSGN's and

14 labeled SSBN's. Right? Wrong! The first SSGN was scheduled for delivery 11/05. Big deal, the 688I class subs had plenty of tomahawk cruise missiles.

So, naturally, the Chinese tells the US that if the US launches nukes on North Korea FIRST, China will launch on the US. Maybe. And, just maybe, if the US launches nukes on North Korea second, China will launch on the US anyway because of the treaty the Chinese have with North Korea. So Dubya tells Russia what the Chinese said and Russia tells the Chinese that if they launch on the US, Russia and the US will launch on the Chinese. Maybe. It was a Mexican standoff and México wasn't even involved. Go figure.

The US launched each of the 20 B-2's loaded 16 with 2,000 pound JDAM's. They also launched the B1B's and every carrier borne fighter in the inventory that could haul the precision 2,000 pound bombs. Screw the Chinese! The US inventory of bombs also included some JDAM's with the BLU-109's. The US didn't need any nuclear weapons to defeat North Korea. They could save those for the Chinese. Somewhere along the line, the Chinese got the message. And, somewhere along the line, all of the North Korean missiles managed to get themselves destroyed. Imagine that.

It appeared that Pyongyang was so busy threatening everybody that they forgot to remember what the US was capable of using only conventional weapons. Once the North Korean missiles were destroyed, the threat was greatly diminished and it became unnecessary to do any more than mop up. North Korea had been preparing for war since 1953. The US had been at war off and on for over 100 years. It's like learning to play the piano, practice is important. North Korea had over 500 fighter aircraft, but most of them were older than dirt. MiG-17's, 19's and 21's accounted for 357 of their 525 fighters. One couldn't joke about the MiG-23's and the MiG-29's, but they had so few. Plus very few of their pilots were graduates of Fighter Weapons School (Top Gun/Red Flag).

Aircraft currently stationed at NAS Fallon include the F/A-18, F-14, A-6, and F-5 jet aircraft, and the H-3 and HH-1 helicopters. The Naval Fighter Weapons School (TOP-GUN), Carrier Airborne Early Warning Weapons School and a Construction Battalion Unit (CBU) have recently relocated here. Currently NAS Fallon is the only Naval Facility where advanced integrated Carrier Air Wing strike training can take place, combining realistic flight training in electronic warfare, air-to-ground, air-to-air weapons delivery, special weapons delivery, and enemy evasion tactics. Military aircraft from the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Nevada Air National Guard train at NAS Fallon.

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US-1, Axis of Evil-0

Wolf Blitzer was still on CNN trying to bring the world up to date on what was happening on the other side of the world in the Middle East. He wasn't having much success because the only connection he could make was with Jerusalem. He couldn't talk to Damascus, Tehran, Amman, Riyadh or Sanaá. Only the major countries knew where the Israelis had launched those Jericho III missiles towards and they weren't talking. Those

countries were the countries with satellite access to the Middle East. Just how far did the Muslims think they could push those Israelis anyway?

The United States, the Russian Federation and China were involved in a 3-way conversation. This particular matter wasn't getting discussed at the UN because they couldn't do much about it anyway. The general tenor of the conversation went something like this. "You attack Israel and we attack you." It didn't include a comment to the effect of 'Good ahead, I dare you' but the import was obvious. Certain powerful countries had been specifically excluded from the conversation too. France, Germany and the UK, just to name the most obvious.

Russia offered to back off if the US could somehow disarm Israel. China was demanding a full accounting. The US was stuck. Having supported Israel since 1948, Bush wasn't in any position to remove his support. In Beijing, Wēn Jiābǎo wanted blood and in Moscow, Vladimir Putin just wanted out of the mess without seeing any bombs or missiles fly. For China, it was the second direct confrontation with the US in a 48-hour period. The US had neatly sidestepped the threats China made about North Korea, only to find itself at loggerheads with the Chinese a second time over Israel's attacks against Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Using its Jericho III missiles configured as Shavit space launchers, Israel was even able to reach some members of the CIS.

Following the launch of the first Ofteq satellite, scientists at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory reportedly calculated that the Shavit "could transport a nuclear warhead a minimum of 5,300 km" if deployed as a ballistic missile and analysts at the Defense Department estimated a range of 7,200 km for the missile, with an unspecified payload capacity. In July 1990, Steve Fetter, a physicist at the University of Maryland, calculated the payload and range parameters of the Shavit, based on data about the two Ofteq launches provided in the press. He found that if the Shavit were deployed as a ballistic missile it could deliver a 775-kg payload a distance of 4,000 km, putting the whole of the Middle East (and a large part of the former Soviet Union) within striking distance.

Behind the scenes, the US was discussing what it should do with the UK and Russia and China were having private discussions. France and Germany had a lot of opinions and believed that the UN should step up to the plate and resolve the crisis. The UN couldn't find its way out of a wet paper bag using both hands and a flashlight. Moreover, the US hadn't used nuclear weapons to defeat North Korea and the entire Korean situation resulted from a UN action of 55 years before. To further complicate matters the 5 carrier battle/strike groups were still headed to the Far East.

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Saturday, November 5, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

The Second Korean War was over and the 3 major powers were at stalemate. According to some of those so-called experts that CNN had brought in to comment on the situation, Russia was being conciliatory and China wasn't pressing as hard as many had expected.

You may recall that as originally announced, the Axis of Evil included Iraq, Iran and North Korea. In 2002, the Axis of Evil had been expanded to include Libya, Syria and Cuba. In January of 2005, Condi Rice had coined a new term, 'Outposts of Tyranny'. Libya had turned into paper tiger, having paid for Lockerbie and abandoned its nuclear program. Syria was toast. Cuba had even banned smoking, another paper tiger. If one were to look at the 6 nations involved in that phrase, the score became US/Allies-6, Outposts of Tyranny-0.

The other prime player in the unfolding drama, Israel, had ejected all foreign reporters and imposed a total media blackout. American, Russian and Chinese satellites revealed that Israel had a few more of the Shavit rockets than anyone had expected and the expended missiles deployed near Sedot Mikha had all been replaced by Shavit rockets. When this somehow leaked to the press, as it always does, Libya and Egypt announced they had no intentions of responding to the Israeli attacks. Fidel didn't have anything to say.

President Bush had halted the Carrier Strike Groups a little over 200 nautical miles from China, obviously sending a signal to the Chinese. The groups were steaming in seemingly endless circles; I believe that phrase is station keeping. Everyone was waiting to see who would make the next move and what that move would turn out to be. When the next move came, it proved to come from an unexpected source, the Palestinians and the Iraqi insurgents.

The Palestinians saw the Israeli action as dashing their hopes at having a separate homeland. Most of the Iraqi insurgents weren't actually Iraqis. They were from the countries that Israel had destroyed back on Monday. The thing was many of the nations around the world needed oil for their machinery and the big three finally agreed to step in and get the Middle Eastern oil flowing again. It had been quite the week, but it was only the beginning.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Seven – The Insurgency

If a person closely examined a map of the Middle East, especially in the area of Israel and Palestine, one would know why the Israelis couldn't attack the Palestinians. It would be cutting off their nose to spite their face. So they had a wall, big deal. Radiation didn't respect any darn walls so they couldn't nuke them. The Israelis had enough to handle just dealing with the radiation from Tel Aviv; they didn't really need to add to the radiation. It's just so easy to say nuke 'em all and let God sort them out, but it doesn't work that way.

Following World War II, the British withdrew from their mandate of Palestine, and the UN partitioned the area into Arab and Jewish states, an arrangement rejected by the Arabs. Subsequently, the Israelis defeated the Arabs in a series of wars without ending the deep tensions between the two sides. On 25 April 1982, Israel withdrew from the Sinai pursuant to the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty. Israel and Palestinian officials signed on 13 September 1993 a Declaration of Principles (also known as the "Oslo accords") guiding an interim period of Palestinian self-rule. Outstanding territorial and other disputes with Jordan were resolved in the 26 October 1994 Israel-Jordan Treaty of Peace.

In addition, on 25 May 2000, Israel withdrew unilaterally from southern Lebanon, which it had occupied since 1982. In keeping with the framework established at the Madrid Conference in October 1991, bilateral negotiations were conducted between Israel and Palestinian representatives and Syria to achieve a permanent settlement. On 24 June 2002, US President Bush laid out a "road map" for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which envisions a two-state solution. However, progress toward a permanent status agreement has been undermined by Palestinian-Israeli violence ongoing since September 2000. The conflict may have reached a turning point with the election in January 2005 of Mahmud Abbas as the new Palestinian leader following the November 2004 death of Yasser Arafat.

May have reached a turning point? Right, and brown cows give chocolate milk. Bush's road map was 1,000 miles of bad roads and it didn't work either. The insurgents in Iraq simply went crazy and they were blowing up everything in sight: Americans, British, Kurds and Shiite Muslims being their favorite targets. Meanwhile, in Israel, the wall and the checkpoints did little to stem the violence. In keeping with the new 'get tougher' policy, the Israelis canned the law and started to shoot anyone committing any act of violence, even if they surrendered. The Palestinians were too fond of blowing themselves up to ever consider surrendering, anyway.

Not everyone was predisposed to immediate violence however; these few individuals had something a little more permanent in mind. Tired of being on the run, Osama and Ayman (al-Zawahiri) got together and decided on their next course of action. They'd use Palestinians on this little adventure and take some of the heat off of Al-Qaeda. There were a lot of sleepers in the United States and the United States was being held responsible for the actions of the Israelis. To get right down to it, the US was being held

responsible for everything wrong with the world. Osama had lost a lot of family in Saudi Arabia but they had disowned him so the only thing that really upset him was the Israeli attack on Mecca.

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Monday, November 7, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

"How's the rehab going?" Gary asked Derek.

"I've done it every day for 3 weeks now," Derek replied. "I think that anything more I do will just take time. They released me from therapy today."

"Do you have any place you don't have a scar?" Gary asked.

"Big toe on my left foot," Derek kidded. "At least being unconscious for as long as I was got me through the initial hurting part. They told me I could go back to work as long as it wasn't anything strenuous."

"What do you think of the situation in the world a week after everything went to hell?" Ron asked Derek.

"Ron, I was very surprised about how things went in Korea, but I guess in this day and age air power is everything," Derek replied.

"The only way they could have saved their nukes, assuming they had any to begin with, was to use them right off the bat," Clarence suggested. "I wonder if China was bluffing or they really would have attacked if we nuked North Korea."

"I doubt we'll ever know now Clarence," Gary concluded. "Frankly, I'm surprised that no one has retaliated against Israel."

"How would we know if they had?" Ron asked. "There is absolutely no news coming out of the Middle East."

"Our government must know what's going on, they have satellites," Clarence pointed out.

"I don't know of course," Ron replied, "But right about now I'd guess Bush has his hands full trying to keep the Russians and Chinese from attacking Israel."

"They did show that one news blurb with the satellite view of the Israelis setting up more missiles," Derek pointed out. "My thinking is that anyone who messes with them is going to get an early Christmas present they don't want."

"Are we still at DEFCON 3 and Threat Level Orange?" Clarence asked.

"I didn't hear anyone announce a change so I'd guess we probably are," Gary answered Clarence. "As far as the Israeli missiles go, I think that was done just to make sure that Russia knew the Israelis could attack them back in the event they decided to sanction the Israeli attacks."

"You guys don't really think that nobody is going to try and get even with Israel, do you?" Chris asked.

"Chris, I don't really care what they do to Israel," Gary responded. "What has me worried is what if they, whoever they might be, decide to blame the United States."

"They already killed a half million people with that bombing in New York on the 4th of July," Chris grouched. "What more can they do?"

"They could try for the other 300 million Americans," Ron suggested.

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Thursday, November 24, 2005, Palmdale, CA... Thanksgiving...

Shirley was out from Iowa to visit Charlene and Sharon. Sharon had a 22-pound turkey going in the oven and the house was packed. Gary was hiding behind his keyboard in the office trying to avoid most everyone. Anymore all that noise seemed to get to him. The house was never designed to hold Sharon and her sisters and him plus his two boys and their two daughters. Add it up and it was darned near a convention. Damon and his kids were 4, Derek and his brood was 5, Lorrie and her basketball team was 7. Add to that Amy and her two kids and you had 4 children, 3 spouses, 13 grandchildren, 2 sisters-in-law and one very tired and irate spouse plus Gary. There were a total of 24 people stuffed into a house that was never intended to hold more than 8 at a time.

The extra TV was set up showing cartoons or a parade or something for the little kids in the back bedroom and the older kids and adults were mostly crowded into the living room and kitchen. Charlene, Shirley, Lorrie, Amy, and Mary were in the kitchen supervising Sharon cooking. Gary got called to the kitchen to peel almost a full 10# bag of spuds, but the minute he was finished, he disappeared back in his office. He was surfing all of the news channels on the web trying to find out anything he could about the state of the Union and the state of the world. He wasn't learning anything and was about to shut down his browser when the little red 2 for his Home Portal Monitor in his task bar turned grey indicating he'd lost his connection to the Internet. When he couldn't get it back, he dug out the sheet of numbers to call SBC. He didn't have a dial tone on either phone line.

"Chit," he muttered and headed for the living room where they were fooling with the TV trying to get the picture back.

"We lost the phones, too," Gary announced. "Derek, why don't you go get your things and Damon can help me warm up the radio room?"

Gary and Damon went out the patio door and moved the flower box to open the shelter. When Gary was about half way down the ladder, the lights went out. No big deal, he'd filled the propane tank with a winter fill and had 9,000-gallons of propane plus the natural gas. The generator kicked in and they went the remainder of the way to the shelter and turned on the heaters to warm the place to about 70°. They went back upstairs to enjoy the turkey.

"What's going on, Gary?" Sharon asked.

"I don't know Sharon, we've lost the phone lines and the TV is out," Gary recapped. "While Damon and I were going to turn on the heaters, we lost power and the backup generator kicked on. Does the stove still work?"

"Where did Derek go, dinner is almost ready?" Sharon asked. "Yes, the stove still works."

"I sent him to pick up his things, he'll be back in a minute," Gary replied.

"What things?" Sharon asked.

"We're just being careful." Gary replied casually. "Let's go ahead and eat, Derek will be back in a few minutes."

After 30 years, Sharon knew Gary as well as he knew himself. There was something about his casual response that didn't sit well with her but she quickly concluded that maybe they'd better get the dinner eaten right away. Derek entered the house through the patio door instead of through the front door because he'd stopped off at the shelter to put his things in the shelter's armory. Gary wasn't fooling anybody, but they went ahead and cleaned up the meal. After dinner, Gary took Sharon aside and cautioned her that something was very, very wrong. He needed to go see Ron and was going to have Derek drive him over. He gave Sharon his 2-meter portable and told her he would contact her once he'd talked to Ron. As you can well imagine, people were starting to get a little bit worried. Telling David and Lorrie to stay there until he got back from Ron's stirred up quite a bit of conversation.

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"I take it you haven't been on your computer," Gary said to Ron.

"Not today, partner, it's Thanksgiving," Ron said.

"Try the phone," Gary suggested.

Ron picked it up but it was dead.

“Now, shut off the movie and turn on your TV,” Gary suggested, “Its dead, too.”

“What’s going on?” Ron asked.

“I’ll be derved if I know, but I’d bet you \$20 you’re running off of your backup generator,” Gary commented.

“I don’t take sucker bets, Gar-Bear,” Ron said. “Let’s go check out my shelter.”

Ron had set his shed over the blast door to his shelter, so he unlocked the shed and they went downstairs. Sure enough, Ron’s generator was running. He turned on the heaters to warm his shelter up and Gary told him that he was going home and get his family into the shelter, just in case. Just in case what, Gary admitted he didn’t know, but just in case. Ron told Gary he’d let Clarence know and then they were going to button up too. They’d be standing by on the agreed frequency on the 2-meter band. That reminded Gary and he called Sharon and suggested that she get everyone down to the shelter because something was definitely wrong.

“Gary,” a radio call came about 30-minutes later. “This is Clarence, what in the hell is going on?”

“Clarence, I have no idea,” Gary replied. “Try listening to the Ham bands and see if you can pick up any news. Call me back on this frequency if you hear anything.”

“All right, Clarence clear,” Clarence announced.

“KD6GDQ clear,” Gary responded.

Chris and Patti had gone to her mother’s for Thanksgiving dinner and Dick must have gone to Tracy’s. There wasn’t anyone out in the neighborhood so the shelter was shut up tight. Against what, they had no idea. Finally, someone turned on an AM radio only to find the EAS warning tone sounding. That got everyone’s attention in a New York minute. The next thing they heard was an announcer telling the listening audience to stand by for an announcement from the President. That’s what the EAS system is for, you know, so the President can inform the public in the case of a national emergency. With the TV’s, phone and electric out, whatever the emergency was, it must be a lulu.

The primary purpose of EAS is to enable the President of the United States to speak directly to the country in times of national disaster through automatic access to the nation’s broadcast outlets and cable systems. A presidential activation is called an Emergency Action Notification (EAN). The communication path from the White House to the local broadcast and cable outlets is accomplished through a web of communication links.

Upon receipt of a National level EAN message, all Participating National (PN) radio and television stations and cable systems are required to interrupt programming and transmit the national emergency message.

Any station with a Non-Participating National (NN) authorization must sign-off the air for the duration of the Emergency Action Notification message.

During a National-level EAS, the EAS Local Plan may also be activated if a local emergency arises.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Eight – The Announcement

“My fellow Americans...”

Yep, that had to be the President. Every one of them Gary heard in his whole life had always started his speeches the same way, especially when he wanted money or had bad news. Gary turned on his micro cassette recorder in case Ron and Clarence were missing the broadcast.

Approximately 2 hours ago, the United States experienced a power blackout,” the President explained. “This broadcast was delayed until enough stations could get on the air to carry the news. The scope of the blackout is unprecedented. We believe that terrorists were responsible but as of yet no group has claimed credit and no group has been identified. With the exception of a few communities that generate their power locally, the entire grid has been brought down. Early reports indicate widespread damage to the electrical infrastructure.

In view of the storm that has been forecast for the northeastern states, your government is working with state and local Emergency Management Agencies to establish community shelters. Everyone is urged to stay tuned to their radios for local information after this broadcast. In a coincidental attack the telephone system was effectively shut down by attacks on satellite transmitters and several long distance facilities. At this time we have no idea how long it will take to restore service.

Thank you and goodnight. God Bless America.

“I guess we don’t need the shelter after all,” Gary said. “You guys help the ladies back up the ladder or lift them on the winch and I’ll contact Ron and Clarence.”

“Ron and Clarence, this is Gary, are you standing by?” Gary broadcast on 2-meters.

“I’m here,” Ron said, “What’s up?”

“Clarence are you there?” Gary asked.

“Standing by,” Clarence replied.

“Bush was just on the radio, did either of you hear the announcement?” Gary asked.

“Nah,” Ron said, “I figured the radio was dead, too.”

“Me neither Gary,” Clarence replied.

“I’ll play the tape I made, listen up,” Gary said and held down the mike key and turned on the recorder.

“Well, it sounds to me like we don’t need to be in the shelter,” Ron said after Gary finished playing the tape. “We’re going back to the house.”

“I’m taking my family upstairs, too,” Clarence agreed.

“Take your 2-meter handhelds and we’ll keep in touch with them,” Gary suggested.

“10-4,” Ron and Clarence both replied.

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It took a while to become evident that leaving the shelter was a mistake. First of all, the house was over crowded where the shelter hadn’t been. Secondly, the Pacific storm finally hit, bringing a regular deluge. And finally, around 7pm, when Sharon went to heat some soup or something for the kids to eat she discovered she had no gas.

“Ron, are you there?” Gary called on 2-meters.

“10-4,” Ron replied, “The gas is out.”

“I’m listening too,” Clarence added in. “I think we’re going back to our shelter, the house is starting to cool off.”

“I have too many people here,” Gary announced, “Which one of you guys is going to help me out?”

“I only have 13 people,” Ron said, “You can send someone over.”

“Thanks partner, I figure out who and they’ll be over in a while,” Gary replied.

“We’ll go,” Derek offered. “That will cut you from 24 people to 19.”

“You’d better swing by your house and pick up a change or two of clothes,” Gary suggested. “You know where he lives.”

“Tell him we’ll be there in about 30 minutes,” Derek replied getting his family around. “I’ll get my things from the shelter.”

Derek’s family would get Ron’s shelter to capacity or nearly so. They figured 19 people was the shelter’s carrying capacity at around 80 square feet per person.

“Ron, this is Gary,” Gary radioed. “Derek will be there in 30 minutes.”

“10-4,” Ron replied.

“Gary, this is Clarence,” Clarence joined in. “We only have 10 people over here so we

can help you out if any more people show up.”

They were still putting people in the shelter when Chris and Patti returned home.

“Chris, our shelter is full up, but Clarence has room,” Gary explained.

“Are all of the utilities out?” Chris asked.

“We still have water,” Gary replied. “Here’s Clarence’s address, think you can find it?”

“I’ll manage, but I sure hate to impose on your friend with Daniel,” Chris answered.

“Dad, why don’t Amy and her kids and mine and me go to Clarence’s?” Damon suggested. “That will leave you 16 people and room for some more if they show up.”

“Clarence this is Gary,” Gary radioed. “I’m sending Damon and Amy and their kids down to your place. Chris and Patti are here and I expect Dick will be around soon.”

“Ok, Gary, I’ll be watching for them,” Clarence replied.

Dick never showed up. Then, Gary remembered that Dick had a portable generator, two of them if you counted the one mounted in his travel trailer. There were 18 people at Ron’s, 17 people at Clarence’s and 16 people at Gary’s. Then Darlene came calling and Gary and Sharon’s count went to 19. Most years, Moon Shadows was devoid of people on Thanksgiving. Very few people actually had their families in, because most of the residents were in their late 40’s or early 50’s. They usually all took off for a parent’s home, mostly in Los Angeles.

There were no further announcements on the radio but the TV finally came back on during the night. They didn’t have all of the channels because some of the satellite feeds must be down. But they had the major news organizations including ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX and NBC.

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Friday, November 25, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

There have been widespread reports of looting in the major cities, ABC was reporting. Authorities have revealed that significant portions of the nation’s infrastructure were attacked yesterday including the electrical grid, the telephone system and several natural gas pipelines in areas all over the country. The White House announced it was bringing the fleets’ home since the difficulties with the Chinese and Russians seem to have abated. There is still no news out of the Middle East. When called upon to give estimates of how long the emergency would last, estimates given by authorities varied widely. Community shelters have been set up all around the county. We take you live to a shelter in New York City where...

“Who cares what the problems are in New York,” Gary laughed, “They can’t be any different there than they are here or anywhere else. You folks watch TV, I’m going to get my headphones and monitor Ham radio.”

Communications worldwide are increasingly transmitted solely through fiber-optic lines, rather than through satellites and radios. “The capacity of fiber optics is so much greater than other communications media or technologies, and it’s also immune to the stick-up-an-antenna type of eavesdropping,” said Jeffrey Richelson, an expert on intelligence technologies. It also made it much easier to disrupt communications. It had taken a fair amount of time to get those news organizations back on the air. However since much of the nation was without power, they saved the new entertainment programs and only showed reruns. ABC’s Nightline got started on November 4, 1979 in the wake of the Iranians capturing the US Embassy. This new crisis fostered a new group of news shows by CBS and NBC. Jay and David were temporarily out of work.

Gary sent Damon to accompany Charlene and Shirley so they could retrieve clothes and Charlene’s pets from California City. They weren’t keeping the pets in the shelter since they had so many people and the only problem was the lack of heat. A portable electric heater warmed the house and everyone’s pets had the house to themselves. Because it was still raining in California and on much of the west coast, it appeared that the Middle West and the East were in for some dramatic winter weather. A slight shift in the jet stream brought arctic air to the eastern half of the country.

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Saturday, November 26, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

The three main LA stations were now covering the looting occurring in LA. There hasn’t been looting on this scale since the Rodney King riots back in on April 29, 1992. They changed the channel to channel 5, KTLA, to get a real perspective on the news. Many of the broadcasters on KTLA had been there for years. Stan Chambers was in his 59th year of reporting. Chambers had seen it all and had covered the 1965-Watts Riots, the Baldwin Hills Dam Disaster and a whole lot more. It helps, sometimes, to have a reporter who can give a personal comparison to then and now. His career with KTLA began in December of 1947, shortly after KTLA became the first commercially licensed TV station in the western United States.

“Hal, I think that this is bad as I’ve ever seen,” Chambers was commenting to Hal Fishman. (A former political science professor, author and holder of 12 official world aviation records for speed and altitude, Fishman began his broadcast career in 1960 and joined KTLA the year of the Watts riots, which he covered in the field. His efforts contributed to KTLA’s winning an Emmy and Peabody Award for news coverage of the event.) It almost seemed if the average age of the news anchors at KTLA was about 75. But they sure could give you some perspective.

“The only difference I see, Stan,” Hal replied, “Is that they haven’t started to burn the buildings down.” (Shame on you Hal Fishman don’t give them any ideas!)

The real story wasn’t on the west coast anyway; it really was in New York and in the northeastern United States. Angered over the July 4th incident and further angered by this new terrorist attack, some of those people in New York were attacking anyone who even remotely resembled an Arab. While the incidents weren’t widespread, there were more than a few. Governor George Pataki had asked President Bush for help in stemming the violence and Bush had federalized the NY National Guard. Pretty clever, Mr. Governor, now the feds will have to pay. Arnold must have talked to his fellow Governors because later in the day Bush came back on TV and declared the entire US a disaster area and federalized all of the state National Guard units.

States with state Defense Forces; there were 21, also activated their state forces. These states included New York and California. Many of the state militiamen and women were trained as combat lifesavers and were equipped with standard kits. More interestingly, Derek was a certified Combat Lifesaver. Derek said he was pretty good at sticking veins, etc. but his only problem was that he didn’t have any equipment. Gary had laughed at Derek and shown him the medical cabinet in the shelter. Therein lay quite an assortment of things included 2 combat lifesaver medical equipment sets, obtained with great difficulty and maintained with even greater difficulty.

The primary problem was maintaining the drugs, which included Atropine, Diazepam and normal saline. Gary had managed to supplement the drugs with Lactated Ringer’s, D5W and D5NS. In fact, he had 2 cases each (24 bags per case) of the ½-liter bags of Sodium Chloride 0.9%, Dextrose 5%, and Lactated Ringers together with additional IV sets. Because the Atropine and Diazepam were controlled medications requiring the family physician to get involved, it hadn’t been all that difficult to get 4 25 count packages of the Morphine Sulfate 10mg/ml 1ml Ampoules. Gary had other prescription medications but they were his normal prescriptions and included his Albuterol and Atrovent nebulizer solutions and his stockpile of Vicodin ES tablets, Xanax 0.5mg tablets and 50mg Benadryl capsules. Whenever the injectable drugs expired, he took them to the doctor who ordered replacements. It was a straight up 1 for 1 exchange and not overly expensive. The Vicodin and Xanax were straight up prescriptions and carefully hoarded. The Benadryl was Diphenhydramine HCL from Eon Labs and available over the counter from the Vons pharmacy for \$5.12/100 including tax.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Nine – The Aftermath

No one should practice medicine without training and the appropriate licenses! Derek had the training to use the IV equipment and Gary had 1-page instruction sheets prepared from the web and confirmed by the doctor showing dosages, indications, contraindications and precautions for each of the prescription medications. Normal Saline (Sodium Chloride 0.9%) was indicated for fluid replacement and shock. Lactated Ringer's solution is usually indicated to maintain electrolytes and generally preferred if available. D5W kept an injured person fed when they were unconscious and D5NS was an acceptable substitute. Some of the IV's were available in combinations. They included Lidocaine and Dextrose, Dextrose and Sodium Chloride, Dopamine and Dextrose and Dextrose and Ringers plus stuff they usually only had in hospitals. There were also suturing materials in the fancy first aid kit that Gary had started out with and the doctor prescribed some 2% Lidocaine with epi to enhance the effect of the Lidocaine in case they needed to do any stitching.

It all came right back to Derek because he was the only person with actual training in establishing IV's and such. The prayer was that none of the stuff would ever be needed. When push came to shove and the whole world finally turned to crap, Derek might be the only help they could get. They had lots of manuals; it was experience they were terribly short on. Better to have a book and some supplies and at least be able to try, if it came to that, then just sit there helplessly and watch someone die.

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Monday, November 28, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

"Why don't you pick up Clarence and come over to my house so we can have a visit?" Gary suggested to Ron on the radio.

"Give me a half an hour and we'll be there," Ron replied.

"I'll be ready when you get here Ron," Clarence acknowledged.

Being Gary had that 'elevator' to get people in and out of the shelter, they set up electric heaters in the house and spent daytimes there. They would go back in the shelter in the evening, just in case. Ron and Clarence eventually showed up and Gary made a second pot of coffee because he finished the first one while waiting for them to show.

"What did you want to talk about?" Ron asked.

"Does anybody have any idea what's going on?" Gary asked. "They said on Friday that Bush was bringing the fleet home; does that mean the war is all over?"

"Good question Gary," Clarence said, "What do you think Ron?"

“Whatever Linda tells me to think,” Ron laughed. “I have no idea what’s going on. Did they say anything more on TV or the radio about when we’re going to get the phone and lights back?”

“I haven’t heard anything, how about you Clarence?” Gary replied.

“I’m like that German Sergeant,” Clarence mused, “I don’t know nothing.”

“Has either of you been out and around or have you just been staying at home?” Gary asked.

“I went to Wal-Mart and bought some more 5.56 ammo and then to Sandy’s and got some 7.62 and some cartridges for my big rifle,” Ron said. “There weren’t too many out on the streets and about ½ the stores are closed.”

“How much ammo did you buy?” Gary asked.

“Bought 2 boxes of the .375 at \$60 a box plus 19 more cases of the 7.62 surplus at \$120 a case, she had it on sale,” Ron replied. “And I got all of the 5.56 that Wal-Mart would sell me, maybe about 200 boxes which is 10,000-rounds.”

“Did you see any Sheriff’s patrol cars?” Gary asked next.

“There were a few out, yes,” Ron replied.

“When were you out doing the shopping?” Clarence asked.

“Saturday afternoon,” Ron replied. “She’s closed on Sunday.”

“But there weren’t many people out on a Saturday afternoon?” Gary was analyzing, “That’s mighty strange.”

“Did you check your stove?” Ron pointed. “The natural gas has been restored.”

“There wasn’t any announcement, I’ll go turn up the furnace,” Gary replied.

“I also saw a couple of service stations that had generators going and were selling gas,” Ron pointed out. “There were busses and military vehicles at Palmdale High School, so I assume they’re housing people in the auditorium. The militia had generators running.”

“If Wal-Mart was open, things can’t be all that abnormal,” Gary suggested. “How about we run by the Sheriff’s Station and get a recap of what’s going down?”

“Works for me,” Ron replied.

“Were Sam’s Club or Costco open?” Clarence asked. “I’m getting low on cigarettes.”

"I didn't get that far," Ron replied, "But I know they both have standby power so we could go check."

"I suppose we'd better just take handguns and leave them in your trunk, Ron," Gary suggested.

"Sure, wouldn't want to get busted by the Sheriff's Department," Ron agreed.

LA County Sheriff's Department, Palmdale Substation...

"Help you gents?" the Deputy asked.

"Looking for information Deputy, can you help us out?" Gary inquired.

"I'll tell you what I know," the Deputy smiled.

"So, where are all the people?" Gary asked. "The population of Palmdale is over 120,000 and there's no way they could fit into all of the High School gyms."

"Some people with their own energy sources are in their homes," the Deputy replied. "The first people that showed up at the High Schools are still there. When the High Schools filled up people were transported to Edwards. It was the nearest place with enough building space to house the folks from the Antelope Valley. I've been out there and they're pretty much packed in like sardines, but everyone is warm and the Air Force chow halls are running around the clock feeding everyone."

"There isn't much news on TV or radio, what happened on Thanksgiving?" Ron asked.

"They've caught a few of them," the Deputy replied. "They mostly seem to be Palestinians. The federal government clamped down on the news media and nothing is being reported until they have the whole group rounded up."

"So what are the Threat Level and the DEFCON status?" Gary asked.

"DEFCON is still 3, but the Threat Level is Red and all commercial aviation is grounded," the Deputy explained.

"What about the electricity and the phones?" Ron asked.

"Electricity should be on by Wednesday or Thursday and the phones by the first of the week," the Deputy continued. He'd obviously been through this before. "They're having problems with the fiber optic cables and rebuilding the satellite transmitters. But at roll call this morning, we were briefed that by the first of the week everything would be back to normal and the people would be returning from Edwards."

“Are Costco and Sam’s Club open?” Clarence asked.

“As far as I know, yes,” the Deputy replied. “Won’t be many shoppers though with everyone out at Edwards.”

Costco, 10th Street West and Avenue L...

“I think we’d better stock up on cigarettes, and some of the stuff we usually buy here at Costco,” Gary suggested. “I’ll start with my cigarettes and then hit the pharmacy for Sharon’s sinus medication. There is a one package limit on that sinus stuff so each of you buy one package and I’ll square it up with you.” (pseudoephedrine)

“We’d better load up on the essentials while we’re at it like toilet paper and fresh groceries,” Ron replied.

Ron was pulling Dave Lucky’s small trailer, which allowed them to get the bulky items. \$1,000 worth of cigarettes, 12 cartons each, fit into one box, but the paper products pretty much filled up the trailer. They also bought shortening, flour, sugar, pre-mixed baking goods, soft drinks, spices and coffee. By the time they were out the door, each of them had left about a grand on the counter. They were close to broke and didn’t have room to haul anything else so they returned to Clarence’s to unload his things and dropped him off. Next they stopped at Ron’s and unloaded his stuff and finally they went to Gary’s, unloaded the trailer and returned it to Dave. Dave wasn’t around, so he didn’t even know they had borrowed it.

After he got home and had everything put away, Gary repeated everything they’d learned at the Sheriff’s Station. Everyone could plan on going home on Wednesday or Thursday and they’d have the phone and the Internet back on by the first of the week. Shirley was just going to have to sit it out at Charlene’s until the airlines were back to flying.

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Wednesday, November 30, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

The FBI announced today the completion of a several day investigation that resulted in the arrests of over 200 people around the United States, CNN was announcing. According to FBI spokesmen, the plot to shut down America’s infrastructure was hatched by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, the number 1 and number 2 men in al-Qaeda. The actual terrorists who carried out the plot were Palestinian refugees who have moved to the United States over the past 5 years. Gas and electricity has been restored to most communities except for the state of California, where on July 4th, terrorists detonated a suitcase-sized nuclear weapon at the Diablo Canyon reactors. While northern California already has power restored, some parts of southern California will be without power for several more days.

In other news, we have first news reports out of the Middle East. Israeli armed forces have encircled the Palestinian refugee camps in Gaza and on the West Bank in an effort to halt the ongoing bombings. The camps in Gaza include: Beach Camp, Bureij, Deir-el Balah, Jabalia, Khan Yunis, Mafhazi, Nuseirat and Rafah Camp and are home for nearly ½ million refugees. The camps on the West Bank include: Aida, Am'ari, Aqabat Jabr, Arroub, Askar, Balata, Beit Jibrin, Camp No. 1, Deir Ammar, Dheisheh, Ein el-Sultan, Far'a, Fawwar, Jalazone, Jenin, Kalandria, Nur Shams, Shu'fat and Tulkarm and are home to nearly 200,000 refugees. The 10 camps in Jordan, 12 camps in Lebanon and 10 camps in Syria were badly damaged in the October 31 attacks by Israel."

"Man it sure didn't take bin Laden long to attack the US after the Israelis attacked those Arab countries," Gary said. "That was less than 4 weeks. I think the only way they could have pulled that off is if they had it all set up and were just waiting for the right moment to launch the attacks."

"You'll have to give the government credit, though," Ron replied. "Two hundred arrests in less than a week. Not half bad. The same thing goes with the gas and the electricity. Some of those blackouts lasted nearly as long."

"I also heard him say that they might not have power on in California," Gary indicated.

"He said several days," Clarence noted. "What do you think that means?"

"Maybe the first of the week, like the phones," Ron replied. "It's not hurting us fellas, we're prepared."

"I wonder when the third shoe is going to drop?" Gary lamented.

"Are you still on that kick about bad things come in three's?" Ron asked.

"Well..." Gary replied.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Ten – “Back to Normal”

Monday, December 5, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

During the night, Gary heard the generator shut down so he figured power had finally been restored. When he got up, he checked the phones and he had dial tone on both lines. With everything restored, everyone could finally go home. Except for Shirley who was stuck until the airlines were up and flying. And there would probably be a backlog at the airport so Shirley might just have to wait a while longer or pay for a full fare ticket. Sister Shirley had money because she was frugal and didn't spend it foolishly. She had gone to work for Banker's Life (now Principal) when she'd graduated from high school in about 1957 and had worked for them even after she'd retired. She made more money working part time on some aspect of their computer system than she ever made working fulltime. But, between falling down the stairs (torn rotor cuff) and slipping on the ice (shattered arm) the previous year, she was now completely retired. Shirley was 4 years older than Gary and 4 years younger than Charlene.

Charlene had been on a steady decline since her husband, Andy, had died from a pulmonary embolism in August of 2004 while Gary had been in the hospital for his 'cold'. Darn shame, too, because Charlene had been a schoolteacher and even the Principal of the school she worked at when Andy and she had lived in Guam. Andy had been misdiagnosed with Parkinson's and the treatment had put him in a bad way. Then, he'd become sedentary and build of some of those blood clots they call DVT. One had broken loose and tore out a lung just like the ad on TV. Andy had been dead when he hit the floor. The reason for the claim of a misdiagnosis was because Charlene had shelled out 3 grand for an autopsy and the autopsy suggested that he didn't have Parkinson's. Some diseases can only be diagnosed on the autopsy table. COPD includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema but they are lumped together until you die. Then if you want to blow 3 grand your family can find out what you had. Who cares, you're still dead and knowing won't bring you back to life? The real cause of death was smoking, either way you cut it. Anyone got a light?

Gary and Sharon made sure that everyone took enough food home with them when they left because with the power out for so long, anything they had in the refrigerator or freezer was spoiled. California City doesn't have a grocery store so Charlene and Shirley went shopping for milk and fresh produce before they left. And now that phone service was restored, everyone had 2 months' worth of funds in their checking accounts. Good thing too, because everyone but Ron and Linda were broke.

Gary gave Ron the final money he owed on the suppressors and they were free and clear. Clarence was chipping away at his balance with Ron and was making very good progress. Not having a house payment allowed Clarence to pay Ron around a thousand a month and he told Ron that he'd have him mostly paid off by the end of 2006. This was probably a good thing because anyone who would pay \$3 a round for a Lion gun didn't manage his money very well. Gary also bought a second Mini-14 and used the extra folding stock and flashhider from Phoenix to make up a second 5.56 assault rifle.

He was short on the PMI magazines but he'd seen a box in the back room of a certain gun store he knew. Maybe the lady would like to be rid of them once and for all.

Which got Gary to wondering what else she'd had on hand when the law had been passed in California outlawing everything but slingshots and bow and arrows. He was always more than willing to help out a friend get into compliance with the law, you know. He called Ron and suggested a little trip to see a friend and help her out. Just being a good neighbor, of course.

It seems that when the law passed, Sandy had several items in stock that were no longer legal in California. All of these things were boxed up in hopes that someday California would come to its senses. Gary explained the little problem he had and offered to help her out. She was more than willing to oblige, but only on one condition. Ron and Gary had to take everything she had that wasn't, strictly speaking, legal. They suddenly found themselves in the possession of two full cases of assorted high capacity magazines and several of the folding stocks and flashhiders for the Mini-14's. It was a one-time deal and it was all or nothing, so they took it all.

This put Gary in the position of having a surplus of parts to convert the Mini-14's to 'assault rifles'. He was plainly told that if he would settle for some used Mini-14's, he could get a very good price. Some people don't care for the Mini-14 and others swear by it. Gary was one of the latter and as far as he was concerned, it was as good as an AR-15. Besides, it only took about 3 minutes to convert one of the rifles from perfectly legal to totally illegal. You drove out the pin in the front sight and slid on the flashhider and drove in the longer roll pin. Then you popped it out of one stock and into the other. Slam, bam, thank you ma'am and you had a pretty nice little weapon. What Ron and Gary ended up doing instead was building conversion kits and selling off enough of them to buy 4 more of the Mini-14 rifles, which they converted and Gary gave each of his kids a Mini-14 assault rifle. Damon also took a shotgun and David also took the 3rd BM-59, leaving Gary with 1 M1A, 1 BM-59, 2 Mini-14 assault rifles and 1 Mossberg 590A1.

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Friday, December 16, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

By the time they had finished the rifle project, Gary had repaid the money to the household account he'd taken to buy the new Mini-14 and his share of the things they'd kept from the 'Sandy purchase'. Everybody was back from Edwards and had returned to work. All around the Antelope Valley, things had returned to normal, whatever normal was. All of the TV channels were now up and running and the news coming out of Washington seemed to be normal. China, Russia and the US had taken over the Middle Eastern oil fields and had them back in running condition. Fuel was now available at a reasonable price based on a flat rate of \$50 per barrel for oil. Bush had introduced new legislation back in August calling for an increase to the Strategic Reserve 700 million barrels to 2,800 million barrels, quadruple the present capacity and to open the second

oil field in Alaska. The Department of Energy was hinting around that it might not renew a lot of those reactor licenses when they came up for renewal. The legislation had finally cleared committee and had breezed through Congress despite strenuous objections by the Democrat party and the environmentalists. Perhaps because it included incentives for more fuel efficient cars and trucks and development of solar and wind power alternatives on a previously unheard of scale.

Incentives were included for natural gas fired generation plants which met certain stringent emission requirements. The California General Assembly was sitting on legislation increasing the number of natural gas fired plants and shutting down the remaining reactors at San Onofre. Diablo Canyon had the best reactor safety record in the country prior to the reactors being destroyed. San Onofre's record wasn't nearly so good and the cleanup after the terrorist attack on Diablo Canyon had everyone in the Assembly worried. Legislation to provide state tax incentives for the low emission natural gas fueled plants was finally being debated and it looked like it might pass. Typically it took up to 3 years to bring a new generating plant on line.

By collocating additional steam fired plants near California's refineries, the Assembly hoped to utilize the steam output of the refineries to generate power. Supplemental steam would be supplied by either burning low sulfur oil or natural gas, the latest technology had to offer. California could become an energy exporter within 3-4 years when the new plants were completed. Arnold said he'd sign the legislation when it reached his desk. Building the new plants would provide hundreds of new jobs and help California's economy, which was about as far in the toilet as it could get. Refineries not capable of producing CARB reformulated gasoline would be closed.

Contrary to some rumors going around, everything in Washington was in good shape and there weren't any bad things going on in the government, excluding some 200+ Palestinian refugees being denied most of their rights due to the Patriot Acts I and II. There was another rumor floating that Dubya had said that if the Supreme Court looked like it might free these latest defendants, he'd pack the Court to prevent it from happening. He claimed he got the idea from FDR. He continued to press Congress to complete its review his judicial appointments. Considering the ages of some of the judges on the Bench, Bush was going to appoint a lot of new Justices anyway.

Sunday, December 25, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

The California General Assembly had passed the new legislation and Arnold had signed it on Friday, December 23rd. Somehow the Republican and the Democrats had finally agreed on something, but then again, this wasn't the budget. A NRA sponsored bill to back off on the stringent California gun laws wasn't supported by Arnold and the California gun laws remained some of the most stringent in the country. There was some small increase in the support in the General Assembly but not nearly enough. The NRA's ILA said it would be back after the 2006 election and had already begun a campaign to replace several of the more intractable legislators.

Macy's had held the traditional Thanksgiving Day Parade and it wasn't until later in the day that the terrorists' attacks had come. However, the loss of power had pretty much destroyed the Christmas season for some retailers. There was a shortage of money to be spent, in many cases, directly tied to the loss of work related to the outages. It wasn't their worst year ever, that had been in an earlier year, but the expected gains in retail sales never materialized. Pundits who were considering what the US had been through in 2005 were satisfied with the economy. There had been an earlier surge in sales, probably related to sudden war preparations, so overall, the growth in the GNP wasn't all that bad. And, unfortunately, the new Pope wasn't doing so well during this holy season in case anyone is Catholic.

Charlene was down for Christmas dinner and the first thing out of her mouth had been a hope that no one attacked the country on Christmas. She had sold Andy's pickup and used the money to put in her own standby generator. It was a Kohler and ran off natural gas and propane and had the automatic switchover feature between fuels. It seemed that she didn't think too much of Gary's shelter. Speaking of which, the fellas built some 'elevator' cages and it was almost like using an elevator to get into the shelter. The cage folded up and the next to the last man down folded the cage so the last guy down could get by after he'd locked up the blast door. It was something Chris built for them and was all very clever. The fellas had also replaced their hand cranks on the winches with electric motors so you could control the 'elevator' from inside. Just was a little project to keep them out of mischief. They been to the range up in the Angeles National Forest several times and had all of their weapons sighted in and joking about getting ready for WW III.

With all of the football games and everything on TV, a person wouldn't have known, had they not been there, that the US had a very tough 2005. Gary had just gotten up from the table after overeating when the phone rang. It was Linda telling him that Ron was in Lancaster Community Hospital. Minor heart attack, apparently. Gary called Clarence to see if he could haul him up to Lancaster to see Ron. Clarence didn't answer and then Gary remembered that his sister was having the Christmas dinner. Derek got drafted to drive Gary to see Ron.

"Darn, they'll let anybody into this hospital, won't they," Gary greeted Ron. Ronald wasn't looking too perky.

"Hey Gar-Bear," Ron tried to laugh but couldn't, "They needed a new MRI or something so they let me in anyway."

"What's with you?" Gary asked.

"Oh, one of my coronary arteries got plugged and they did an angioplasty to clear it out," Ron said. "Now it's the same old thing of waiting for my leg to heal up from the surgery."

"Did you ever think about trying a low fat diet?" Gary asked.

“Why would I do something like that?” Ron asked. “I almost have my own permanent bed by now.”

“One of these days, you’re going to get clogged up and you won’t get to the hospital in time,” Gary said. “You do that; I’ll pee on your grave. I tried to get Clarence but he’s at his sister’s for Christmas dinner.”

“Anything unusual happen today?” Ron asked. “These people seem to like to ruin our holidays.”

“Not that I know of, Ron,” Gary replied. “Just the usual football games and crap like that on TV. I’ve been hiding out in my office most of the day. At least with Lorrie and David going to his Dad’s for Christmas, the house wasn’t quite as packed. They tell you when you’re getting out?”

“Probably the day after tomorrow or Wednesday,” Ron replied. “It all depends on whether or not I did any damage to my heart.”

“Did you have a heart attack or just angina?” Gary asked.

“Yes,” Ron replied, “One or the other.”

Angina pectoris is the medical term for chest pain or discomfort due to coronary heart disease. Angina is a symptom of a condition called myocardial ischemia. It occurs when the heart muscle (myocardium) doesn’t get as much blood (hence as much oxygen) as it needs. This usually happens because one or more of the heart’s arteries (blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle) is narrowed or blocked. Insufficient blood supply is called ischemia.

Typical angina is uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest. The discomfort also may be felt in the neck, jaw, shoulder, back or arm. Many types of chest discomfort aren’t related to angina. Acid reflux (heartburn) and lung infection or inflammation are examples. Angina is normally treated by dissolving nitroglycerine under your tongue to dilate the heart’s blood vessels to get you through and an angioplasty to clear the clogged blood vessel.

A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to part of the heart muscle itself – the myocardium – is severely reduced or stopped. The medical term for heart attack is myocardial infarction. The reduction or stoppage happens when one or more of the coronary arteries supplying blood to the heart muscle are blocked. This is usually caused by the buildup of plaque (deposits of fat-like substances), a process called atherosclerosis. The plaque can eventually burst, tear or rupture, creating a “snag” where a blood clot forms and blocks the artery. This leads to a heart attack. A heart attack is also sometimes called a coronary thrombosis or coronary occlusion.

If the blood supply is cut off for more than a few minutes, muscle cells suffer permanent injury and die. This can kill or disable someone, depending on how much heart muscle is damaged.

Sometimes a coronary artery temporarily contracts or goes into spasm. When this happens the artery narrows and blood flow to part of the heart muscle decreases or stops. The medical profession is not sure what causes a spasm. A spasm can occur in normal-appearing blood vessels as well as in vessels partly blocked by atherosclerosis. A severe spasm can cause a heart attack. Heart failure, generally congestive heart failure is different. This is a long-term condition with various sets of symptoms. That's why people like Gary with a perfectly good heart do a treadmill every year. Diabetes is something that changes a person's whole body. Unlike Ron with a cholesterol level of 300, Gar-Bear has a cholesterol level of slightly over 100 because of a low fat diet.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Eleven – A Time to Heal

Wednesday, December 28, 2005, Palmdale, CA...

It didn't really matter whether Ron had angina or a heart attack. One usually led to the other. In either event, he was out of the hospital and not moving very fast because his leg was sore. They never gave him much of a break; he had several scars on each leg from the repeated angioplasties. A few years earlier and what he had would have killed him right out of the gate. This one had, back in 1992, but isn't medicine wonderful? Just when you think you've died and gone to Heaven, they zap your chest and bring you back. It had only been a single bypass, but it ran in the family and both he and Robert had needed to have bypass operations. Robert had had 2 so far. But the older you got, the more risk associated with the surgery. This thing with the cholesterol was genetic anyway and it didn't really matter how hard Gary preached at Ron, he was going to have high cholesterol. It was like the 3 of them and their smoking. They'd already killed themselves; they might just as well enjoy it.

Clarence had the bypass too and coming out of surgery he'd had a stroke. He was the combination kid and he had everything Ron had and Gary's diabetes. Except when Clarence went on a low fat diet, it helped lower his cholesterol. As messed up as his body was, he'd probably outlive both of them. Because of his diabetes, Clarence had one hell of a time healing up his leg from where they'd taken the vein. He was paying a lot of attention to his health these days.

"Darn Ron," Clarence said, "I'm sorry I couldn't get to the hospital to see you. But I ate an extra slice of turkey for you, just in case."

"What are you going to do New Year's Eve?" Ron asked to make conversation.

"I was thinking about going shooting cans," Clarence replied. "But since I'm a can I don't suppose I'd better do that."

"What cans, Clarence?" Gary asked.

"AfriCANS, MexiCANS and Puerto RiCANS," Clarence laughed at the old joke.

"You sure full of it today," Ron observed.

"I feel good Ron," Clarence replied. "Especially since it was you in the hospital instead of me."

"Remind me to add nitro tablets to my medical stores," Gary said.

"You probably ought to consider some Heparin 1:10000," Ron said. "I'll give you a package of my Nitrostat 0.4 tablets. They come 25 per package."

"I'll have to talk to the doctor about Heparin, Ron," Gary said. "They gave it to me the last time I was in the hospital so I didn't get blood clots, but it really screwed up my blood sugar. Besides, if I remember right, there are some contraindications and some precautions. You know that Dr. J started me on Cymbalta, don't you?"

"What's that?" Clarence asked.

"Scientifically speaking," Gary replied. "Cymbalta is a balanced and selective serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SSNRI), meaning it affects two naturally occurring chemicals in the brain and the spinal cord, serotonin and norepinephrine. It was the first FDA-approved treatment for the management of pain associated with diabetic peripheral neuropathy. It's obviously expensive, Dr. J wouldn't write an Rx. It will be interesting to see how it works out with me taking Zoloft, which is a SSRI. There are 5 different SSRI's: Celexa, Luvox, Paxil, Prozac and Zoloft. I took Prozac, but Zoloft worked better for me." (The current trend in treatment-resistant depression is toward combinations of two medications, either to boost their efficiency or to counteract potential side effects. Aren't you glad I told you that?)

"What was this bit you were saying about them attacking us on holidays?" Gary asked.

"All I said was those people seem to like to ruin our holidays," Ron replied. "I told you that in the hospital."

"What people, the can people?" Gary asked.

"That was just a joke," Clarence insisted. "I can tell jokes like that cause I'm an AfriCAN, you ain't, so you can't!"

"It seems like a double standard to me," Gary replied.

"I thought we was on the Gold Standard," Clarence said.

"Not since the 1930's Clarence," Ron replied. "Money is only a promise to pay anymore. That probably won't change until we have another war."

"There you go again, joking about getting ready for WW III," Clarence replied.

"Who's joking?" Ron asked.

"Yeah, I already wrote that Chapter," Gary said. "What was it anyway Ron, Chapter Two or Three?"

"Chapter Two was 'When, Not If' and Chapter Three was '343 hours'," Ron replied.

"See Clarence," Gary said, "It was my Chapter Two."

"If that's the case, who are we going to war with?" Clarence asked.

"How should I know, Clarence, ask Fleataxi?" Gary said, "He's the one with the most nuts. He has over 507,000."

"It's got to be China," Ron said, "They have the least to lose because they don't have much to begin with besides people."

"It could always be Russia," Gary suggested, "They have almost as many warheads as we do."

"Yeah, but Derek said their delivery systems were shot," Ron pointed out.

"When did you talk to Derek?" Gary asked.

"You did put him up at my shelter for a few days, so we visited," Ron replied.

"Don't believe anything that boy tells you Ron, he's crazy," Gary said. "He volunteered to go to Iraq."

"I thought Damon was the crazy one," Clarence said.

"Not crazy enough to volunteer to go to Iraq," Gary point out, "He's just bi-polar, not crazy. Sometimes it takes something like this to sort everybody out. Bi-polar is weird, volunteering to go to Iraq is crazy."

"I don't know how crazy he was. Gar-Bear," Ron suggested. "Derek got some scratches and now he's 80% disabled. Maybe he's crazy like a fox."

"Shush up Ron or I'll kill you off in my next story, too," Gary laughed.

"Unless I have a heart attack for real and beat you to it," Ron countered.

"Anybody got a light?" Clarence asked. (New version of who's on first?)

"Doctor told me smoking was going to kill me," Gary said. "I told him I'd quit if he promised me I'd live forever. He promised and I quit."

"What happened next?" Clarence asked.

"He took it back the next time I went to the office so I started smoking again," Gary explained. "I decided he wasn't God."

"What made you decide that, Gar-Bear?" Ron asked.

"Well, he's an Iranian," Gary replied, "And everybody knows that God is a Jew."

“You spent far too much time around Tony,” Ron laughed.

“Gary, Tony owes me \$170,” Clarence chuckled.

“You can have it from the \$10,000 he owes me, Clarence.”

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Monday, January 2, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

Top lawmakers called on President Bush to pressure Russian President Vladimir Putin on several key fronts during a summit this week, with one senior Republican warning on Sunday that Putin “is on the verge of isolating himself.”

China criticized a joint statement by the US and Japan declaring the peaceful resolution of China’s dispute with Taiwan as a strategic objective.

“Irresponsible remarks” related to China’s national security are “untenable,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan said in a statement posted on the ministry’s Web site last night. The Chinese government opposes the US – Japanese statement as an infringement of the nation’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, the statement said.

All of that was old news from back in February of 2005, but it seems so appropriate. Maybe Ron, Gary and Clarence were wrong. Maybe nobody was going to attack the US. Or, maybe Russian and China were ganging up on the US because of those joint maneuvers they’d planned back in 2005. What were those all about anyway? Did someone say something about practice? It’s like learning to play the piano, practice is important. On the other hand, if the US could do what it did to Korea in a few days using conventional weapons AND if Derek was right about the Russians having a problem with their launch capabilities, who would be darned fool enough to attack the United States?

The answer should be obvious, anyone who thought they could come out on top. The Chinese missiles were far more modern than the Russian missiles but on the other hand, if none of the Russian missiles were any good, how did Russia keep launching those spacecraft to keep the International Space Station going? Some folks just liked to bad mouth Russia, perhaps. All of this business about who would come out on top had been settled years before and the conclusion was that if the major powers engaged in a nuclear exchange everybody lost. Why then did countries like France and Germany try so hard to stir up trouble between Russia and the United States?

Did those countries actually believe that they somehow wouldn’t get hurt in an all-out nuclear exchange? Do you actually remember when the commercial asked ‘does she or doesn’t she’ and was talking about whether the lady dyed her hair instead wondering about something else? Times sure change.

Here we were on the first workday of the New Year. Not much had been done for a while what with Ron having his little problem and Clarence hauling Gary over to visit Ron every day. All 3 of the men were reasonably confident that the US hadn't seen the end of its troubles but no one was certain what would come next. None of them believed that either China or Russia would risk an attack on the US; it simply made no sense. It was rainy this year like it had been the previous year and between the rain and Ron's delicate condition; they couldn't get up to Angeles National Forest to practice. They did plan to get to a meeting every Wednesday, however. Going to a meeting wasn't always about sharing but every once in a while a guy had to talk and unload all the crap he was carrying around. Drunks are the loneliest people in the world.

It was a lot of fun to listen to the confidence of the newcomers. And the beauty of it was that 90% of them would be newcomers again. And again. And again. AA was the most successful program there was for dealing with the disease, but you had to work at it. You didn't really get a free lunch or a free ride and you got out of it just exactly what you put into it. If you worked at it, it worked for you. The opposite was unfortunately true, in most cases. Just about when you stopped wanting to go to meetings was when you needed a meeting in the worst possible way.

The Three Amigos were quite the little group. They were 3 worn out old drunks but man they could sure count on each other. There was never an excuse made when one of them needed something. Like when Clarence really needed a shelter because of his family. Ron and Linda had the money so Clarence had his shelter. And Clarence was way ahead on his payments too. Since there really wasn't any such thing as being over prepared, Gary got Derek to teach him what he'd been taught in the Combat Lifesaver Course he'd taken in the military and Gary paid for Derek to attend EMT-1 classes. It wasn't about Derek becoming a Paramedic, necessarily; it was about that day in the future where the knowledge would come in handy because there weren't any medical professionals available.

Gary hooked Derek up with Paramedic Enterprise, Inc. They charged \$525 per person for EMT-1 Certification which included 114 hours of classes and the certification fee. That would go very nice with the Combat Lifesaver training Derek already had and it was a good starting point for having medical service available. After Derek had his EMT-1 certification, Gary was going to hook him up with the Paramedic Training Institute. Formal Paramedic training consisted of:

Lecture/lab 429 hours
Hospital based clinical 160 hours
Field Internship 480 hours

Graduates from PTI receive 32 units of college credit and are eligible for California Licensure after successful completion of the National Registry Examination. The fees were:

\$ 885 Books and Materials
\$ 848 College Tuition
(Note: fees may be subject to change)

Additional Fees:

\$ 125 Local Accreditation
\$ 180 State License
\$ 42 Fingerprints, Department of Justice processing
\$ 50 National Registry Application

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Twelve – The Family Doctor

Wednesday, January 4, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

Gary had a doctor's appointment down in Northridge and while he was there he discussed the Heparin situation with the doctor. After reviewing the sheet of directions and learning that Derek had the background he did and had started the EMT-1 training the day before, the doctor wrote the Rx. He also wrote an Rx for the nitro and even suggested a couple of things that Gary hadn't considered. They were 'litmus test' types of diagnostic tools, e.g., specially treated strips that could be used for rudimentary lab tests. Professional Urinalysis Reagent Test Strips, Quickvue Influenza A/B Test and EIdonCard Blood Typing Kit were recommended and Rx's written as needed. Since there were no other patients in the office, the doc took a few minutes and listed some infections and the appropriate antibiotics with indications, contraindications, precautions and dosage. More Rx's were forth coming with enough of the drugs for 6 courses of treatment of each. Amoxicillin, Cipro, Erythromycin, Keflex and Doxycycline were recommended and prescribed. Most were dirt-cheap but Cipro liked to break the bank.

The doctor didn't stop there because some of the medications need to be in liquid form for children, tablet/capsule form for adults and in injectable/IV form if they ever came up against a trauma case and no doctor was available. The office call was relatively inexpensive, but filling all of the Rx's almost led to a heart attack even though the doc had recommended a wholesale supplier. Nevertheless, they were one step closer to getting prepared. Now they needed to get Derek through those courses.

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Thursday, March 23, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

Gary's 63rd birthday celebration was a quiet affair but there was much to celebrate. Derek was now a certified EMT-1 and was enrolled in the Paramedic training. After the cake and ice cream, Gary and Derek spent some time in the shelter inventorying, sorting and analyzing the state of their medical preparations. Derek told his Dad that they needed a defibrillator to round out their medical preps. Both Ron and Clarence had bad hearts and a defibrillator was not a luxury but a necessity. That one corner of the shelter was beginning to look like a doctor's office. Derek also had a list of additional drugs for his Dad to talk to the Dr. about including Sodium Bicarbonate and things he might need if someone actually had a heart attack in the middle of a TSHTF situation. Gary told Derek fine, but from now on, Derek was in charge of the medical supplies, because it was just getting too complicated for Gary to keep straight.

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Tuesday, July 4, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

Obviously the world hadn't torn itself apart quite yet. Derek was well into his Paramedic training and The Three Amigos had managed to avoid any more medical emergencies. From all outward appearances, Derek seemed to have a flair for emergency medicine and his diagnostic skills were gaining rapidly as he got his formal education. He now had a paramedic box or two and they were almost completely supplied with the supplies from the shelter. Next thing you knew, he'd probably want a used red pickup with the boxes on back like the LA County Paramedics had.

"How's are you feeling these days, Ronald?" Gary asked.

"Well, I finally gave in and went on a low fat diet and they changed my meds," Ron replied. "I can't believe it, Gary, my cholesterol is down to a little over 200."

"If this keeps up, you may make it to 66," Gary laughed. "We'll add some cholesterol test strips and a meter to our medical supplies. Clarence, what about you?"

"I'm feeling good, Gary," Clarence replied. "Just fighting to keep my sugar down."

"How about we go to the range tomorrow after the meeting?" Gary suggested.

"Suits me, although I'm beginning to believe that we're never going to need all of these preparations," Ron replied.

"Jeez, Ron, I'd have thought you'd be happy things had settled down," Gary mused. "We can't have reactors being blown up every day, you know. China and Russia have settled down and we're back to sparing with the French and Germans."

"It sure is hot," Clarence said. "Anyone heard how hot it's supposed to get this summer?"

"Not really, but it's the Antelope Valley so you know it will be hot, Clarence," Ron replied. "That's why we have air conditioning."

"I'll bet we have a lot of brownouts and blackouts this year," Clarence suggested. "They may be building new power plants but they'll be a long time in coming and if it gets hot, it might be cheaper just to run our generators instead of using Edison."

"They extended that energy credit to back like it was in the first half of 2004," Gary explained. "If you put in a 10kw wind turbine they will pay about 1/2 of the cost up to \$17,000. I looked into it but since the credit had dropped, didn't put one in."

"Is that why Palmdale has so many new wind turbines?" Clarence asked. "I wondered about that. What's that great big tower at Avenue S and Sierra Highway?"

"Clarence, in August 2004, the Palmdale Water District held their dedication ceremony of the 950 kW (kilowatt) wind turbine located on the site of the Palmdale Water District's

water treatment plant,” Gary explained. “The system was constructed by Dressel Enterprises utilizing a NEG Micron NM54/950 Turbine. The purpose behind the wind turbine construction was to eliminate most of the need for grid electricity even though the plant would remain connected. Eventually the system is expected to decrease environmental impact and dependency on power from Southern California Edison. At the time of completion the District’s wind turbine was the largest wind energy net metering project in the United States. The project was also the most cost effective ever to qualify for California’s Self Generation Incentive Program.”

“Really?” Clarence replied. “What about all of those little turbines popping up all over town?”

“Those are part of the energy rebate program I mentioned,” Gary replied. “Now would be a good time to put in wind turbines because the credit is up to the maximum until the end of the year.”

“How big do you figure we want?” Ron asked.

“10kw,” Gary replied. “Since the credit only covers up to 10kw, that’s big enough. The biggest expense is those batteries anyway. I checked out some of the systems in 2005 and the batteries really jack the cost.”

“How long of a lead time to get one put in?” Ron asked.

“About 8 weeks,” Gary replied.

“How much do they cost?” Clarence asked.

“That’s the tough part, pal, \$33,550 for the equipment,” Gary replied. “In addition to the equipment costs, a complete installation will typically include shipping, sales tax, permit costs, foundation and anchoring, wire run, turbine and tower erection, electrical hook-up, and inspection fees. These costs typically range from \$6,000 (customer installed, no sales tax, etc.) to \$15,000 (Certified Dealer, expensive permits, sales tax, etc.). But, we can finance the purchase.”

“Gee, I don’t know about that,” Clarence responded.

“Take out a home improvement loan, like Gary did for his shelter, and write the interest off on your taxes,” Ron suggested.

“That’s what I’m going to do,” Gary explained, “But I think maybe I’ll put in a 30kw unit and sell Edison a lot of electricity.”

“How’s that work?” Ron asked.

"It's like a saving account Ron," Gary explained further, "Edison banks the energy you supply and offsets it against the energy you draw when the wind isn't blowing."

"They settle up at the end of the year?" Ron asked.

"Nothing is perfect, Ronald," Gary laughed. "No, it's just lost and they get it for free."

"How much do you figure is the minimum we need?" Clarence asked.

"10kw, like I said," Gary answered.

"That's all I'm buying," Clarence announced.

"Yeah, me too," Ron agreed.

"I'm going to do a spreadsheet and see what's the best deal for me," Gary remarked.

As it turned out, the best deal for Ron and Clarence was the 10kw systems and they went ahead and applied for the permits first. Once they had the permits, they ordered the systems and had them professionally installed. Everything was up and running by Labor Day, Monday, September 4, 2006. They installed the 10 kW - Bergey Excel-S, with GridTek 10 Power Processor - 240 VAC, 60 Hz, Single Phase and the Trojan L-16; 6 VDC (350 ampere-hour), flooded-cell lead-acid battery strings. Battery-to-battery electrical leads were included. Expected operating life ranged from 5-10 years with proper maintenance. They compromised on the B350-20 that gave them 42kw of stored energy. The batteries and the DC power center added about \$6 grand to their installation costs.

Gary opted for a 30kw system and a bank of 2.2v Excel submarine batteries and 30kw of stacked inverters.

By Labor Day, Derek was well along with his Paramedic training. He used the 3 old geezers for practice. This turned into a good thing when he detected a possible problem with Ron's heart. Ron went to his doctor and they did an angiogram and then his umpteenth angioplasty. The doctor said that the angiogram showed Ron's blood vessels to be in the best condition he'd ever seen in Ron. Gary and Clarence seemed to be fine. Gary did the treadmill/echo cardiogram routine once a year in May as a measure of added insurance. Besides, the doctor needed the money and he could pick up all kinds of extra samples once he explained about his Paramedic son and their survival shelters. Gary had gotten Derek a regular defibrillator unit instead of one of those home units. There wasn't all that much difference in the price anyway.

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Sunday, October 1, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

Derek was studying hard because he had his National Registry Examination coming up. His personal Paramedic equipment was now complete and it had taken him, Gary, Ron and Clarence and some help from the doctors to get them to this particular point in their preparations. Even after Derek had finished his Paramedic training, there was still more for him to learn and additional classes for him to take; like Physician Assistant classes. He had a job lined up with the local Ambulance Service, American Medical Response. Derek had managed to turn Gary's desire for an emergency medical technician into a career. As primary transportation provider for the Los Angeles County Fire Department, AMR Southwest Region held the single largest municipal contract in the United States. And, the upside was that AMR disposed of medical supplies the moment they were outdated. We've had that discussion before. There is outdated and there is no good and they aren't necessarily the same.

Strenuous physical therapy and exercise had essentially restored Derek to normal. He had some internal damage that would never be repaired but he compensated. He managed to pass the physical required of all of the AMR employees even though he was listed as 80% disabled. He really was disabled and was carrying around a couple of pieces of iron from that IED. Those pieces of metal weren't life threatening and the doctor's had decided that the risk of removal was far greater than the risks associated with leaving them in. His only problem from that time on was that he set off metal detectors.

The NRE's occurred once a month. The written examination, consisting of 150 multiple-choice questions, was based on tasks identified in the EMT Basic Practice Analysis conducted by the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians and the DOT Curricula. The practical portion of the examination would be administered by approved EMT Training Programs or approved CE providers. The National Registry Skills Sheets would be used and maintained by the school. A CE record should be completed for each student who successfully passes the skills examination. No CE hours are available for skills testing and the program title should be NREMTB Skills Test.

Caution: Don't practice medicine without a license. For emergency situations, make absolutely sure you take only the minimum necessary steps and that you know about allergies, etc. Antibiotics can save you or kill you. Sharon, for example, is allergic to penicillin and sulfa, a fact the doctors never seem to be able to remember.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Thirteen – Putting It All To Use

Thursday, November 23, 2006, Palmdale, CA... Thanksgiving...

It wouldn't be much of a survival story if we never had another survival situation arise. Be careful what you wish for, there is God's sense of humor to remember. One year to the day after the previous National Emergency, another one was recognized. It had taken Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri that long to get a new plan into play. The second cell of sleepers was still in the US waiting for their turn. There were 5 cells of sleeper's altogether but only bin Laden and al-Zawahiri knew that. The first cell had done the NY City bombing and Diablo Canyon. They were also behind the power, gas and phone outages the year before. When that cell was captured, the two men just moved on to the next cell. No, I'm not confused; the guy they bombed in Iraq on June 7, 2006 was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

A new strain of avian virus was making the rounds of the Far East. It wasn't a terribly serious virus but was highly contagious. Op plan C had been in the works for several years. It seems that Saddam Hussein had developed a weaponized influenza virus that was potent as all get out. It made SARS look like the common cold. The men had recovered the virus from Syria long before the Israelis blew them to Hell and gone and had a group of scientists duplicating the vaccine. They turned that cave on the Afghanistan/Pakistan border region into a regular biomedical facility. For two years now they had been distributing the vaccine to Muslims all over the world. Had they only known that the Israelis were going to blow up the Middle East, they could have sent all of the vaccine to other Muslim countries. Working 24/7, they managed to immunize about 80% of the Muslim population.

For Op plan C to work, they needed an influenza epidemic that: 1) wasn't related to any of the 3 strains in the normal Flu Vaccine determined by the WHO; and, 2) mimicked the prevailing outbreak. The opportunity presented itself a bit early in the form of that avian virus and the fact that the Flu Vaccine that made the rounds in 2006 wasn't a protection against this strain of avian virus. They kept producing vaccine but by early November of 2006, the men realized that they had to act now or lose their chance. It was a simple enough matter to infect several groups of Mexican immigrants headed to the US. These immigrants were to be placed in cities all over the country, mostly as domestics, so that just put frosting on their cake. By the time the immigrants began to show the symptoms of the engineered virus, they would already be in their new city. By the time that the CDC figured out that it wasn't the avian virus for which there was no protection; it would be just short of a pandemic.

Influenza viruses that infect birds are called "avian influenza viruses." Only influenza A viruses infect birds. All known subtypes of influenza A virus can infect birds. However, there are substantial genetic differences between the subtypes that typically infect both people and birds. Within subtypes of avian influenza viruses there also are different strains.

Avian influenza H5 and H7 viruses can be distinguished as “low pathogenic” and “high pathogenic” forms on the basis of genetic features of the virus and the severity of the illness they cause in poultry; influenza H9 virus has been identified only in a “low pathogenicity” form. Each of these three avian influenza viruses (H5, H7, and H9) can theoretically be partnered with any one of nine neuraminidase surface proteins; thus, there are potentially nine different forms of each subtype (e.g., H5N1, H5N2, H5N3...H5N9).

The outbreak started in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Phoenix, Albuquerque, Denver, St. Louis, Kansas City, Minneapolis, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Atlanta, New York and Boston. It was holiday season and people were out shopping everywhere and spreading their infections. Initially no one was particularly worried because this avian influenza that was going around didn't seem to be lethal, even to the folks with compromised immune systems. And then, the Monday of Thanksgiving week, the virus took a nasty little turn and people started to die; first by the dozens and then by the hundreds and finally by the thousands.

The National Institute of Health and the CDC were on the case from the time the first death was reported. The death toll was in the thousands by the time they were able to isolate the strain involved. On Thanksgiving Day, 2006, the CDC informed President Bush and he issued a National Bulletin via the EAS. At this point in time, the CDC still didn't realize that they were dealing with an engineered virus.

4:00pm PST...

“My fellow Americans,” Bush greeted from Crawford.

“I have been informed this day of the seriousness of the new strain of flu virus making its way around the United States. The Centers for Disease Control have succeeded in isolating the virus strain and while it mimics the avian virus that was making the rounds earlier, it is an entirely separate disease. The current flu virus offers no protection against this new virus strain. On Monday of this week the virus claimed its first life. Before that day was over, dozens of people in cities all over the country died. On Tuesday, hundreds of people died in the US and outbreaks were reported in the United Kingdom, Europe and Asia.

“Yesterday the death toll exceeded 50,000 in a single day. Effective immediately I am implementing the following steps to contain this outbreak:

- 1. All airlines and all public forms of transportation have been ordered grounded or halted;*
- 2. A state of emergency exists within this country, indeed the world, and I am imposing martial law and a dusk to dawn curfew;*
- 3. Representatives of our military will call on each and every home in this country to distribute N-95 level facemasks;*

4. *Until such time as you are equipped with the proper protection equipment you are hereby confined to your homes;*

5. *Persons requiring medical assistance should contact their local authorities for assistance; and,*

6. *If and when a vaccine is developed against this deadly form of flu, it will be manufactured and distributed on the basis of priority.*

I ask for everyone's cooperation is this time of extreme emergency. I have issued orders nationalizing all National Guard units in the United States. I will ask for assistance from the various state Defense Forces. Folks, this virus is a killer and it is as simple as that. As much as I regret having had to do so, orders to shoot on sight have been issued to the military for anyone found outside of his or her home without the necessary protection.

This disaster has all the earmarks of the disaster on Thanksgiving last year with one clear exception. Last year, the greatest risk anyone ran was in getting cold. Your government was able to respond and few deaths resulted from the terrorist attacks. This year, we will not be establishing evacuation centers because of the danger from contagion. For those of you without sufficient resources to remain in your homes, local hot lines will be established and distribution of food and medicines will be handled by the military. The number will be the same in all communities, 1-GET-HELP-NOW.

"Laura and I pray that a majority of the citizens of this great country and the world get through this pandemic safely. God Bless America."

At the 3 homes in Palmdale where The Three Amigos were gathered with their families, there occurred a somewhat universal exclamation. "Chit!"

"Hello?" Ron answered the phone.

"Hey, partner, isn't this a mess? Well, what choice do we have, we have to isolate. I have the N-95 and N-100 masks and so do you; do you know if Clarence does? Ok, I'll call him, ciao."

"Clarence, this is Gary, do you have the N-95 or N-100 masks? No? Ok, Derek will bring you a few boxes. We're going to ground in the shelter; I suggest that you do, too. Yeah, same frequency on 2-meters if the phones go out."

Derek had his N-100 mask on and was already out of the door. They passed out the N-100 masks and David and Damon headed to their cars to go clean out their refrigerators. Derek stopped by their apartment on the way home and an hour later, they were all safely in the shelter and not wearing the N-100 masks. The announcement had come at 4pm. These people had spent all day together. If anyone had the virus, they all had it

now. Fortunately, no one seemed to have any symptoms of so much as a cold. The sole reason for moving to the shelter was the matter of space. The shelter was much bigger than Gary and Sharon's house. Did I mention Shirley and Charlene were there?

"Well, I don't know if I'm coming to California next year," Shirley said. "Every time I get here we have another disaster."

"There is no particular reason the two of you have to stay here," Gary said. "Even if the power were to go out, Charlene has backup power."

"I was planning on going to the store for groceries tomorrow," Charlene said. "I can't do that now, so we don't have much food in the house."

"I guess that everyone might just as well get comfortable, then," Gary replied.

Friday, November 24, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

The TV networks had already replaced their regular anchors with the new employees with the companies, perhaps because they were expendable?

"Hey, uglier than me."

"Ronald, nobody is uglier than you. Did your mother have any kids that lived?"

"Only my brother," Ron replied.

"Have you talked to Robert?" Gary asked.

"Yeah, they're locked up in their house and aren't going anywhere," Ron replied. "They only go grocery shopping about every other month and they went a couple of weeks ago so they'll be fine for a while."

"I guess it was a good thing we stocked up on the first of the month," Gary agreed. "It won't be all that long before we're into the survival supplies, however."

"The stuff from Walton's or your back stock?" Ron asked.

"We won't get to the Walton's stuff for a month, Ron," Gary said. "Derek seems to think that this thing will all be over by then. Hang on and I'll conference Clarence in on this call."

"Clarence? Gary," Gary announced. "I have Ron on the other line and I'm going to conference both lines together. Ok, can you both hear me?"

"I hear you, Gary," Clarence replied.

bother to answer the phone when it rang and hoped Sharon wouldn't. He could hear the siren coming from 3 miles off, but it took them about 4 minutes to get to the house. They stacked the rifles against the house after they'd removed the magazines and stripped the round out of the chambers. Damon conveniently took the suppressors to the shelter but there was no hiding the fact that the rifles were selective fire.

The Deputies piled out of the car with their weapons drawn. Gary, David and Derek were sitting on the swing on the front patio.

"What happened here?" a Deputy asked.

"These men were burgling my house," Gary said, "And since they didn't have masks, I follow the Presidential directive and shot them."

You don't look like military or law enforcement to me," the Deputy said.

"Palmdale Militia," Gary answered, "It's in the Constitution."

"Hey Sarge," the second Deputy said, "These are automatic weapons."

"We're going to have to confiscate those weapons," the first Deputy said.

"No you're not," Gary replied, "That is the 2nd Amendment and you are not taking anything. Where are your masks, or do we have to shoot you too?"

"In the car," the Deputy replied.

"Better get them," Gary replied, "Right boys?"

"That's right Grandpa," the sounds of several grandchildren and Damon came from the corners of the house.

One Deputy looked east and one looked west. Those were some nasty looking shot-guns and Mini-14 assault rifles. Did anyone ever explain to you about discretion? Discretion is the better part of Valor. About that time 2 more squad cars pulled in and a Lieutenant was now in charge. The Deputy Sergeant explained the situation to the Lieutenant and the Lieutenant called for the Coroner.

"What's this Palmdale Militia crap?" the Lieutenant asked.

"Some folks call us the 10th Calvary," Gary explained. "Would you like to meet the rest of the Troop?"

"I think I would," the Lieutenant replied.

Gary nodded to Damon who returned to the shelter and called Ron and Clarence and told them the 10th Calvary was needed. I'll bet you thought that 10th Calvary uniform of Clarence's was just literary license, huh? Guess again, folks. Five minutes later, Ron, John, Kevin, Mark and Bobby Joe showed up and Ron was Lion hunting. About 3 minutes later Clarence showed up in full uniform with his 2 boys. They had the cops outnumbered about 3 or 4 to 1. The Lieutenant was a Lieutenant because he knew all about discretion. He concluded that these guys must be part of the California State Military Reserve. Problem solved, for now.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Fourteen – Automatic Weapons

Are totally illegal in California. So are suppressors and so are folding stocks for rifles as well as large capacity magazines and flashhiders. The Palmdale Militia, aka the 10th Calvary had all of those, for certain. They even had a .375 H&H Magnum rifle, which was totally legal. The first rule of any confrontation is that when you're outnumbered and not in charge of the situation, you extricate yourself and your people. Then you worry about the legalities. The Lieutenant told his Captain and later that day they returned to the scene of the 'crime'. They knocked on the front door but the knock went unanswered. They had probable cause and had been issued a search warrant. The Lieutenant opened the front door of Gary and Sharon's home to execute the search warrant.

BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ

This time around, they left the BM-59's in the shelter and they had the Mini-14's in their original Birch stocks they came with, and the flashhiders had been removed. They had a large number of 5-round and 10-round magazines for the Mini-14's and when they came out of the shelter everyone was armed with a legal firearm under California law. They also closed the shelter cover when everyone was out and none of the Deputies happened to see where Gary and his family came from. I believe that you're probably all familiar with the expression, "Kiss my rosy red butt," right? At the moment the Olsen family didn't evidence any disregard for the law and the weapons were all perfectly legal under existing California law. The law says that you have to identify yourself when requested to do so by a peace officer. Where does it say you have to show him where your bomb shelter is? Minutes later, the 10th Calvary arrived and the LA County Deputy Sheriff's once again found themselves outnumbered, but not nearly as badly.

No one pointed any weapons at the Deputies who were all properly attired in N-95 masks. Gary and the others were also properly attired and that attire also included latex gloves this time around. Gary accepted his copy of the search warrant and told them they were free to search the home and shed listed on the warrant. He declined to state where he and his family came from, but he was more than willing to produce proper identification, as were all members of his family and as were the members of the 10th Calvary aka the Palmdale Militia when they showed up with totally legal hunting rifles and shotguns. California law doesn't prohibit magazine extensions on shotguns nor the legal length 18" barrels. It does prohibit pointing weapons at a police officer in the performance of his or her lawful duties, perhaps, but no weapons were pointed at anyone by any member of the 10th Calvary aka Palmdale Militia.

Did you ever read the 'Armed Citizen' section of 'American Rifleman' magazine? What does it say? It repeats the 2nd Amendment to the Constitution. It also says, 'Studies indicate that firearms are used more than 2 million times a year for personal protection, and that the presence of a firearm, without a shot being fired, prevents crimes in many instances. Shooting usually can be justified only where crime constitutes an immediate, imminent threat to life, limb, or, in some cases property.' Does going without a protec-

tive facemask in direct contravention of a Presidential directive constitute imminent threat? I'm willing to debate with you about that. The Lieutenant wasn't; he was only looking for guns and the search warrant only covered the house and the shed.

Next question. Does an Assault with a Deadly Weapon occur when someone is holding deadly weapon if he makes no threatening gesture with it? Fine line and this wasn't the time for anyone to find out. Mr. Olsen was merely guarding his property and he cooperated with the Deputies and allowed the search. Other than that, he had the right to remain silent and he did. He produced his California ID card when asked because he had no Driver's License. Go ahead and arrest him if you have a reason, he needs the money. (Plus, nobody really believed that a Kevlar vest would stop a .375 H&H Magnum bullet.)

Saturday, November 25, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

Saturday morning the Deputies returned. This time they surrounded the house before opening the door and tripping the alarm. No one appeared until a few minutes later when Ron and Clarence showed up with their families. The new search warrant included all possible hiding locations but they had no idea where the shelter was. They should have checked with the building department, Gary had pulled a permit. The Deputies left and Ron called Gary on the 2-meter radio telling him that it was all clear. Ron spoke too soon, the Deputies drove around the block and came right back. By this time, Gary, David, Damon and Derek were out of the shelter and they closed it up when they heard the tires screech. They weren't even armed because Ron and Clarence were there.

You may recall that Darlene Jones had been in the shelter. Darlene Jones's ex-husband Johnny was one of the Deputies this time. Darlene had told Johnny about the shelter but didn't tell him how to gain entrance. Neither had his 2 kids. Johnny was very frustrated and grabbed Gary by the shoulder maybe to shake a little sense into him. Gary declined to do any more than identify himself. Johnny refused to let Gary go until ordered to do so by the Lieutenant.

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Monday, November 27, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

An hour's grilling by the attorney didn't shake Gary's story one bit. He had merely used his 5th Amendment rights and declined to answer Johnny Jones's question about the location of his shelter.

US Code: Title 42, § 1983:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws,

shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress, except that in any action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer's judicial capacity, injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable. For the purposes of this section, any Act of Congress applicable exclusively to the District of Columbia shall be considered to be a statute of the District of Columbia.

Attorneys just love Civil Rights cases; they take so long to litigate they get very expensive. This one was a slam-dunk; several LA County Sheriff's Deputies and several private citizens had seen the behavior. Johnny hadn't hurt Gary, but that wasn't the point. There is a Constitutional guarantee to be secure in your person and that includes being free of battery. Battery is the wrongful touching of another person and it has nothing to do with the extent of the injuries inflicted. Johnny detained Gary thereby depriving him of his liberty. The case was brought for nominal compensatory damages and large punitive damages. \$5 followed by 6 zero's. This was a grey area in the law and the case could go either way. The City of Palmdale was going to end up paying one way or another. They either settle the claim quickly or spend who knows how much on attorney's. The case was settled for 10 cents on the dollar and the attorney took ½. How did Gary make out? His house was now paid for. He had money in the bank. All because a Deputy got frustrated and grabbed his shoulder and wouldn't let go.

The Sheriff's Department didn't come back looking for the guns. It just wasn't worth it. However, the Lieutenant and The Three Amigos got to be friends. Johnny wasn't too happy, but the settlement precluded any finding of liability against him and he got over it. This would prove to be important in the coming days.

Meanwhile, people were dropping like flies. By the time the CDC finally isolated the engineered virus, it was bordering on too late. The only thing that saved the people of America was that darned me confinement Bush had forced on everyone. People who chose to ignore it soon found that even a N-95 mask didn't offer them sufficient protection. N-100 masks were just enough extra to save peoples behinds but they were in extremely short supply. The 3M N-95 masks can be had for about \$2 each, while the 3M N-100 masks run about \$6-\$9 each. That \$4 were the difference between living and dying in many cases. Penny wise and pound foolish, some would say.

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Thursday, December 25, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

This had to be the first Christmas Gary and his family had totally enjoyed in years. For one thing, money was not a problem for a change. Secondly, President Bush had been on TV the evening before and delivered a Christmas present to the nation. Martial law was suspended and freedom of movement restored. Sister Shirley decided that she just might as well stay for Christmas and Charlene was going to the grocery store on the way home. In-laws are a whole lot easier to love at a distance. Their precautions had paid off. None of The Three Amigos or their families had gotten so much as a sniffle.

They had a new friend in the Lieutenant who off the record had agreed that Johnny had gone a little overboard.

The Lieutenant had called to wish them a merry Christmas and had told them that he might be stopping by at the beginning of the week. Gary called Clarence and they moved all of the illegal weapons to Clarence's shelter on Christmas Eve because neither Darlene nor her kids knew anything about Clarence's shelter. Ron did the same thing, just in case. The Lieutenant did come by on the day after Christmas as it happened. Gary showed him the shelter and it was searched thoroughly. So was Ron's, but they didn't find a thing that was illegal. It seems like Clarence had 'forgotten' to pull a permit on his shelter.

Friday, December 26, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

"Well, it's good to know that Ron and you didn't have any automatic weapons," Lt. Rob Horn said.

"I didn't have a shelter either until I showed it to you," Gary chuckled.

"Then you do have automatic weapons," Horn concluded.

"I didn't say that Rob," Gary responded. "I said what I said. What's the point in getting all worked up about some automatic weapons? Have we ever really done anything wrong that you can prove?"

"Not that I can prove, no," Rob agreed.

"Then why don't we leave it that way?" Gary suggested. "There might come a day when you need the 10th Calvary to ride to your rescue. What if we showed up with automatic guns blazing and saved your tail? Would you still want to take away our guns and throw us in the slammer?"

"I suppose not," Rob said. "But you know that I'm sworn to uphold the laws whether I like them or not."

"Fair enough," Gary said, "But that doesn't mean that you haven't selectively enforced the laws in the past and won't do it again, depending upon the circumstances."

"Sometimes the letter of the law doesn't result in justice," Rob said.

"That's true, Rob," Gary admitted. "I probably shouldn't have brought that § 1983 against Johnny either, but dang it, he violated my rights."

"It was a good object lesson for Johnny," Rob pointed out. "You weren't really hurt and that's one mistake he won't make again. It will probably hold up a promotion to Lieutenant for a couple of promotion cycles but it was a cheap lesson."

“So are we going to get along?” Gary asked.

“Well if you do have anything illegal, don’t flaunt it and put me on the spot, ok?”

“I think we can manage that,” Gary replied. “Any word on how many people died in this epidemic?”

“The US or worldwide?” Rob asked.

“Either, both, I’m just curious,” Gary answered.

“50 million in the United States and about 2 billion worldwide,” Rob replied. “The strange thing was that the death tolls were the lowest in the Muslim countries.”

“That might suggest who was behind it Rob,” Gary pointed out.

“Thinking it and proving it are 2 entirely separate things,” Rob replied.

◦

Washington, DC...

“What you’re telling me is that we lost 17%-20% of our population and we had the tightest prevention measures of anyone?” the President summarized.

“That’s right Mr. President, and the Muslim countries that probably had the worst possible precautions didn’t have death tolls any worse than ours,” Goss replied.

“How can that be?” Bush asked.

“Our best estimate was that they were immunized against this very specifically engineered virus,” Goss replied.

“How can a guy like bin Laden keep escaping us?” Bush asked.

“Low friends in high places, probably,” Goss guessed.

“Any idea who developed the virus in the first place?” Bush asked.

“We’re thinking Saddam had it engineered and transferred it to Syria before we began Iraqi Freedom,” Goss replied.

“There aren’t any Syrians or Saudis to hold accountable any longer,” Bush shook his head. “Where in Heavens name is bin Laden?”

“Afghanistan, Pakistan or maybe even Iraq,” Goss responded. “Frankly, since he quit using cell phones, we don’t have a clue. They seem to have gotten into buying large quantities of those disposable phones and only using them once.”

“With the exception of the World Trade Center in 1993, bin Laden has been behind every attack on the US, in my opinion,” Bush said next.

“Your father just teed him off,” Goss said. “This guy is such a zealot and he hates this country more than anyone can imagine. That al-Zawahiri is pretty much cut from the same bolt of cloth.”

“Any suggestion about how to even this thing out?” Bush asked.

“I’d put 100 million dollars cash money on each of their heads, dead or alive,” Goss suggested. “Sooner or later the price will get high enough that someone will betray them. 100 years ago, I’d have jokingly told you to Wire Paladin, San Francisco.”

“We’ve tried Special Forces and that hasn’t worked,” Bush pointed out.

“Maybe we need a different bunch of Special Forces, Mr. President,” Goss suggested.

“Set it up and I will get the money somewhere,” Bush directed.

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Sunday, December 31, 2006, Palmdale, CA...

“Why don’t Linda and you come over for New Year’s Eve?” Gary has asked Ron the previous Friday.

“Man we hate to go out on New Year’s Eve, Gar-Bear,” Ron had answered. “But I’ll ask Lyn and see what she says.

A similar invitation was extended to Clarence and Lucy. On Saturday afternoon both men called at different times to accept. Gary and Sharon ran to Albertson’s and picked up the usual assortment of crackers, smokies, cheddar and Monterey Jack, hot pepper cheese, pepperoncini, jalapeño rings, etc.

“Hey Gary, thanks for having us over,” Clarence said.

“Clarence, Lucy,” Gary replied. “We usually just sit around the kitchen table, it that ok with you?”

“Where do we go to smoke, outside?” Clarence asked.

“My office, pal,” Gary replied, “You ready now?”

“Lead the way,” Clarence smiled.

“You want coffee first?” Gary asked.

“I’m ok the way I am,” Clarence replied.

“I have a bunch of fireworks in the garage and I mentioned it to the boys,” Gary said.
“They might be by later to pick some up.”

“I can’t get over us have a trained medical man as part of our group,” Clarence said referring to Derek. “That was right smart of you to put him through school.”

“I sort of owed him,” Gary replied, “My Dad put me through school. But I wanted someone who had some medical training and since he was a certified Combat Lifesaver, it just made good sense.”

“Ron coming over?” Clarence asked.

“The only man in the world that I know who runs later than you do is Ronald,” Gary laughed. “I told him 7pm, what time is it?”

“8:15,” Clarence said.

“There’s his car now, Gary pointed, “Right on time.”

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Fifteen – Team Players

“I’m glad I told you to come at 6pm,” Gary teased Ron.

“You said 7 so I figured you meant 8 and that’s when we started to get around,” Ron laughed.

“Clarence, Ron is the type of guy who will be late to his own funeral,” Gary remarked.

“God, I hope so,” Ron quickly retorted.

“Rob told me that the world wide death toll was about 2 billion and the US death toll was about 50 million,” Gary related.

“They said something on TV about it being a terrorist attack,” Clarence pointed out.

“Rob told me that in the Muslim countries the death toll was very low,” Gary observed.

“The only way to kill a snake is to cut its head off,” Ron added.

“Either that or lock it up in an airtight box,” Gary added.

“We’re going to need to make trips to Costco and Sam’s Club,” Clarence suggested.
“How about we do that on Tuesday”

“Tuesday is good,” Ron said. “I need some things from Walton Feed if they’re still around. What about you guys? Is there anything you need from them?”

“Here’s a list of what I need to replace,” Gary said opening a file on his computer and hitting the print button.

“How’d you do that?” Clarence asked.

“I set up an Excel spreadsheet and listed all of my supplies, their expiration date, stock level and quantity on hand,” Gary said. “Whenever something expires, the formula changes the quantity on hand to zero. And whenever I use something I update the spreadsheet.”

“You keep the meds on the same spreadsheet?” Ron asked.

“Nope Derek is in charge of those,” Gary explained. “I know he just started with AMR, but he’s already added several castoffs to our drug cabinet.”

“Are you going to get all of your drugs that way from now on?” Ron asked.

"It would be nice, Ron," Gary said, "But there are some drugs that really are no good when they expire. Antibiotics lose their effectiveness and things like epinephrine definitely have to be replaced. The Dr. J worked a deal for us to get all of our drugs through a wholesaler."

"I've been buying mine from Canada," Clarence said.

"And I've been making runs down to Tijuana," Ron related. "It's all ok as long as you have the Rx."

"I meant to tell you Ron," Gary changed the subject, "I think that it would probably be ok to get our weapons back from Clarence. Rob suggested that we don't put him on the spot, but he seems like a real standup guy."

"Johnny pissed at you for suing?" Clarence asked.

"Rob said he'd get over it," Gary related. "He was wrong to grab me like that. I'm not angry with him."

"Don't you feel just a little bit guilty over suing like that?" Clarence asked.

"Not at all Clarence," Gary said. "An officer's response has to be proportional to the situation. I wasn't threatening anyone in any way; I just invoked my 5th Amendment rights. Johnny got mad because Darlene told him I had a shelter and he couldn't find it. He's a Sergeant, he should have known better."

"They went through mine with a fine toothed comb," Ron said, "You too?"

"Oh yeah, and you should have seen their reaction to my drug cabinet," Gary laughed. "But I made copies of all the prescriptions so there was nothing they could say."

"I finally got Ron paid off," Clarence related. "Now all I owe for is the wind turbine."

"One of my friends gave me a hard time over the brand of wind turbine I chose," Gary said. "But we have them and he doesn't, as far as I know, so what the hell, a bird in hand is worth 2 in the bush."

"The pandemic made 3, Gary," Clarence pointed out, "Does that mean our troubles are over?"

"Wouldn't that be nice?" Ron agreed.

"The opera ain't over until the fat lady sings, fellas," Gary responded. "It would be nice, but in the today's world, who knows?"

"So, what is your next project?" Ron asked.

“I think I’m going to buy knives plus bows and arrows,” Gary replied. “It was Einstein who made that crack about WW IV, you know. “According to the news, China lost 40% of its population to the sickness, but they had a total crop failure this year.”

“What about the Russians?” Ron asked.

“I heard they only lost about 20% plus of their population,” Clarence replied. “They had crop problems, too, but not like China.”

“Countries that took Bush’s lead came out ok, I think,” Gary suggested. “And you’re right Clarence, that was 3. But somehow I have a nagging feeling we haven’t seen the last of the trouble. It could very well be that the next thing that happens could be TEOCAWKI.”

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Sitting there in Palmdale, The Three Amigos had no concept of how badly off the world really was. The crop failure in China was absolutely total and there wasn’t enough food to feed the remaining population. Russia had lied about the seriousness of their crop failure and was scrambling to find food anywhere they could. The death toll in Europe had ranged from 20% to 40% depending on the area. There wasn’t any surplus from the previous harvest and they were going to be in tough shape when it came to putting in a crop for 2007 because of the deaths. The crop failures were widespread with only the North American Continent having produced good crops. In Africa, as many people were dying from starvation as were from the engineered virus.

Everybody hated the United States until they came looking for food. At those times, we were their best friends and they even borrowed the money from us to pay for the food. The US saw itself as a moral nation with obligations to the rest of the world; which was fine in theory, but sometimes didn’t work out. Somalia might be a perfect example. The US just kept plowing ahead, trying to save the world from itself and exporting Democracy. Not everyone wanted that Democracy, unfortunately, and when the US put strings on things like food, the country just further embittered the rest of the world. The Ugly American might have been a book and a movie, but it told a lot about the country’s failings; or, perhaps, the failing of the attitudes of some people.

The beginning of 2007 wasn’t the time for the United States to be preaching. People were starving in many places and the US was demanding too high a price for what it had to provide. America wasn’t worried; it was still the most powerful nation in the world. The military had been quarantined from the outset of the pandemic and mostly survived intact. There was not any damage to the infrastructure from the viral attack and local police organizations were now coping with local troubles.

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On Tuesday, January 2, 2007 they went shopping and filled in their supplies. Ron ordered stuff from Walton Feed that seemed to still be in business. The following day, turned out to be something else. As a young man, Gary had been into archery but that had been 45 years ago. All he had running around in his brain was a name: Bear. Maybe Bear was the best and maybe other companies had brought out products that surpassed the products the late Fred Bear's company produced. Gary didn't care; he'd decided that he wanted Bear. With those extra dollars from the City of Palmdale burning a hole in his pocket, he got Ronald to take him to LA where they went shopping. He came home with 12 of the Bear F-340 crossbows and enough bolts to last to the 22nd Century. The following day, the 3 of them went to Ventura and laid a ton of money on the counter at Cold Steel. They bought knives, tomahawks and spears.

Ron just shook his head. They had enough ammo for their guns to last several years. However, he did like the look of some of those Cold Steel products and bought the same as Gary and Clarence for his family. The Laredo Bowie seemed to be the choice of all 3 men and they cleaned them out. Hell, they bought enough products to qualify for wholesale prices. The following day, Clarence and Ron went to LA by themselves and bought crossbows for their families.

On Friday, the order came in from Walton Feed and Ron distributed it among the 3 of them. That was also the day that the American Congress voted down legislation to grant loans to Russia and China to buy food. You might want to remember what day that civilization, as mankind knew it, ended. Sunday, January 7, 2007. Russia and China had been quietly moving their remaining Armies to secure locations. The vote in the US Congress came a day or two after they were ready. Derek was just a little short on being right about those Russian missiles but Gary had been right in his assessment of the Chinese capabilities. They got lucky because Derek was working the midnight to 8am shift Sunday morning. When the warning was sounded of the impending missile attacks, he called his Dad and then Ron and Clarence. They in turn called their other children and by the time the missiles struck, their immediate families were safe.

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Sunday, January 28, 2007, Palmdale, CA...

There had been wave after wave of attacks. They had continued until all three countries had fully exhausted their land based and sea based missiles. The radiation levels had been far higher than expected and the 3 groups had to remain in those shelters for a full 100 days. In the last minutes before the missiles began raining down, Chris and Patti and their family had shown up together with Dick and Jason. Johnny Jones and his ex-family had also shown up as well as Rob and his family. A couple of other Deputies made it to Ron's with their families as well. You remember Clarence's shelter that nobody knew about? Filled to capacity with Deputy Sheriff's and their families.

"I hate to think what it might look like out there," Gary said to Rob. "There were 2 steady days of attacks."

“We won’t know until we look, Gary,” Rob replied.

“Hang on just a minute, Rob,” Gary said, “I need to make some calls. Ron, you got your ears on? Clarence are you there?”

“What’s up Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“I’m here with the whole darned Sheriff’s Department,” Clarence responded.

“We’re going topside to have a look around,” Gary radioed. “I let you know with my hand held what we find.”

“10-4,” both men replied.

“Derek give me a BM-59 and switch those Mini-14’s over to assault rifles,” Gary instructed. “Are you ready to go up top, Rob?”

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The scene that greeted them was one of utter desolation. Plant 42 must have taken a couple of hits. Gary’s house and shed were basically unusable. Most of the Moon Shadows housing tract was nothing but ruins.

“It’s bad fellas,” Gary radioed. “My whole housing tract is gone and it looks like yours are too. I can see all of the way to the mountains from my backyard. My tower and tank survived, but the house and shed are gone.”

The simple truth was that the tank would not have survived had not Gary and his friends added a blast protection wall to protect the tanks. Some of the antennas were missing from the un-extended tower, but Gary had spares for everything. So did Ron and Clarence.

“Let me use your radio Gary,” Rob asked.

“Ron and Clarence would you get all of the Deputies in your shelters to make their way to Gary’s?” Rob transmitted.

“10-4.”

“I’ll get my medical kits,” Derek said. “There may still be some people alive.”

“Yeah, go ahead, kid, but don’t get your hopes up, this is really, really bad,” Gary said.

“What’s the radiation level?” Rob asked.

“About 75 milliRads,” Gary replied looking at his Survey meter. “It’s tolerable. I’m sorry but I don’t have a lot of those dosimeters. If I keep my family down below, I can maybe give you one for every other man.”

“I guess we’d better work in teams then,” Rob said. “I wonder where we can find any running vehicles.”

“You might try the used car lots and see if you can find any old diesels,” Gary suggested. “They might run.”

It took a while for everyone to assemble at Gary’s. Ron and Clarence had zapped their dosimeters and passed them out to the Deputies. It turned out that there actually were enough to go around because Ron had bought several extras. The Deputies headed out shanks mare with Derek in tow to see if they could find any vehicles that would run and if there were any people they could help. Gary found out what frequencies they were using on their handheld radios and set up his scanner to listen to their radio traffic. Derek had a 2-meter handi talkie. Damon helped Gary and they replaced the damaged antennas on the radio mast and extended it to its full height. Then, they returned to the shelter to wait for the Deputies to return.

Ten hours later, well after dark, the Deputies returned to the shelters. They had 7-8 running diesel vehicles. They’d cleaned out the armory at Sheriff’s Station and had even picked up the sears and parts to convert those military surplus rifles back to M16A1’s. As far as people went, the only survivors they’d found were other people who also had shelters. Those people were few and far between. Their conservative estimate was that Palmdale had lost about 95% or more of its population. Derek didn’t find anybody that he could help. People who had not been killed outright had succumbed to radiation poisoning. All except for the people in shelters and they seemed to be pretty well prepared. He’d hit every pharmacy in town and had all of the remaining insulin and prescription meds on his list of what The Three Amigos and their families took plus whatever antibiotics he could recover. He also had a diesel powered LA County Paramedic vehicle.

“We sure can’t stay in this desert,” Gary suggested. “At least not for very long. Counting the supplies that we have and the head count of people, we maybe have enough supplies for a year at best.”

“We’ll see what we can do tomorrow to get more running vehicles,” Rob replied.

“You might want to check out Lancaster, they were a lot further from plant 42,” Gary suggested.

“Do you fellas have any extra 5.56 ammo?” Rob asked. “We don’t really have that much.”

“Hey Ronald, you there?” Gary radioed.

“What’s up, partner?” Ron replied.

“Rob needs some 5.56 ammo and you have the largest supply,” Gary explained.

“10-4, I’ll give them a few cases to start them off,” Ron agreed.

“I have some 30-round M-16 magazines, Rob,” Gary said. “I didn’t have the heart to sell them off. I have extra ALICE gear too.”

“I don’t suppose you have any hand grenades or rocket launchers do you?” Rob asked.

“Nope, that would be illegal,” Gary laughed. “As soon as you can get a semi running, we’ll head up to Barstow and see what we can find at the Marine Corps Logistics Base. Still worried about our having automatic weapons?”

“It doesn’t seem quite so important anymore,” Rob admitted.

“Well, gentlemen, I used some of that money from the City of Palmdale that Johnny was so gracious to provide to go over to Ventura to Cold Steel,” Gary said. “I can give each of you a Bowie knife to go with that ALICE gear. There doesn’t seem to be much point to you guys wearing those uniforms any more. Did the army surplus store survive?”

“White’s?” Rob asked. “More or less, yes. We can get BDU’s there tomorrow along with whatever ALICE gear he had in stock.”

“I’ll give you a CD V-715 to take with you so you can make sure they aren’t radioactive,” Gary said.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Sixteen – Scavenging

Monday, January 29, 2007, Palmdale, CA...

With vehicles to get them around and feeling a little more secure with the restored military weapons, the Sheriff's Deputies cleaned out the surplus store in Palmdale and the two in Lancaster. More people had survived in Lancaster, but not many more. The Deputies located several running semis and both loaded and empty trailers. Anything of value was hauled back to Palmdale and parked along the streets in the housing tract. They cleaned out The Gun Store (formerly owned by Jack First) and the other gun store in Lancaster. The Gun Store was a class III dealer and supplied the Sheriff's Department. None of the gun stores in Palmdale had survived the attack. Neither had Sam's Club but Costco was intact. They loaded all they could carry and went back for more.

This continued until Friday. By that time there really wasn't much they hadn't picked up and they were down to 2 empty trailers. They had lots of good, running diesel pickups however. On Saturday, it was decided to make that trip to Barstow. The Three Amigos took one of the pickups and trailed along. Damon and Derek followed in a second pickup. Each group had its own agenda. Derek was looking for any medical supplies he could find and The Three Amigos were, quite naturally, looking for weapons and MRE's. The Deputies wanted whatever small arms they could come up with. As it turned out, everyone got about what they wanted. Both semis were packed to the gills and what they couldn't bring back; they figured they'd never need.

Monday, February 5, 2007, Palmdale, CA...

"We have all we're going to get, Gar-Bear," Ron said. "Where do we go from here?"

"What is the country like around Cedar Hill?" Gary asked.

"Rugged," Ron replied. "Are you thinking of heading east?"

"It was just a thought," Gary replied. "We're going to have to find someplace with woods that we can farm.

"Eastern Colorado would be my first choice," Rob announced. "That's farm country but if you're on the western edge of it you'd have the woods and mountains, too."

"It would have to be south, you know," Gary said. "That Warren AFB up in Wyoming must have had the crap blown out of it."

"Why don't we go to Cedar Hill and see if Robert got through this thing all right?" Ron suggested. "He'd have a pretty good idea where we might want to locate."

"Suits me," Gary said. "Rob, do we have enough semi tractors to pull all of the trailers?"

“We’re one for one, Gary, but we’re going to need some tractors and trailers to haul your equipment from your shelters, your propane tanks and your radio towers,” Rob replied. “We found a 175-ton crane so we can lift the stuff up and set it on some lowboys.”

“What about fuel?” Clarence asked.

“We have a Chevron tanker with 8,000-gallons of diesel,” Rob replied. “The other trailer was empty so we detached it.”

“Why don’t you pick up that empty trailer and we’ll see if we can pump enough fuel out of the service station tanks to fill it?” Gary suggested.

“Sure, we’ll pick it up today,” Rob agreed.

By Wednesday night, the several families were ready to leave for New Mexico to check on Ron’s brother and then on to somewhere in Colorado. They’d taken down the radio towers, wind turbines and loaded them and the tanks plus the contents of the shelters onto 3 lowboys. They ‘camped out’ at the Day’s Inn Motel and the following morning, Thursday, February 8, 2007 started early in the morning for New Mexico. They took I-15 to Barstow and I-40 to 491 where they turned north for Shiprock. From Shiprock, they went east on 64 to where they picked up 550 to Cedar Hill. The distance was 760 miles, more or less. It was around 10:30 in the evening, California time when they arrived.

“Ron, you made it!” Robert said. “I was worried about you. Who are all the people? I know Gary but who are the others?”

“That’s Clarence over there with his family and Gary’s family is gathered around him,” Ron said. “The third bunch of people is some people we ended up making friends with. They were all with the LA County Sheriff’s Department.”

“Are you just passing through?” Robert asked.

“We want to go to Colorado and I suggested that you might have a good idea where we could relocate,” Ron replied. “We probably lost 95% or more of our population which means that we’re going to end up going back to like it was a hundred years or so back.”

“You mean horse farming and like that?” Robert asked.

“There aren’t any refineries turning out fuel so I guess that will eventually be the case,” Ron replied.

“Aren’t we all pretty old to be starting over?” Robert asked.

“That’s what the kids are for, Robert,” Ron replied. “Gary’s boy Derek is a Paramedic so we have rudimentary medical care. And, Gary and he have a lot of medical equipment, too. It’s not perfect, but it’s what we have.”

“Well, I suppose you could pick up 160 and head east,” Robert replied. “Once you got to Walsenburg, you could pick up Colorado 10 and head northeast. There are a bunch of lakes and reservoirs in the area where you hit US 50. You sure picked one hell of a time of the year to move to Colorado.”

“More it picked us that we picked it, Robert,” Ron replied. “We won’t be going totally primitive. We talked about picking up some trailer homes in Pueblo and dragging them to wherever we end up. There are 3 generators and 3 wind turbines on our lowboys plus about 25,000-gallons of propane and another 15,000-gallons of diesel fuel.”

“That equipment will all wear out some day,” Robert said.

“True, but maybe by then, we’ll have some alternatives, Ron agreed.

“How many of you are there altogether?” Robert asked.

“About 60,” Ron replied.

“Well, get them into the house and into the basement or anywhere they can find room and we’ll get coffee brewing,” Robert suggested.

◦

Friday, February 9, 2007, Cedar Hill, NM...

“You know Ron, I don’t think that we’ll come with you folks,” Robert said. “We’re pretty secure right here and we have our own neighborhood committee.”

“I have my kids to think about or I’d stay here,” Ron said.

“We talked it over and I guess you can say it’s final,” Robert continued. “We’ll come looking for you folks in the spring.”

“I know you when you get your mind made up, so I won’t argue,” Ron replied. “I’ve been looking at a map and we’ll either be in the area of John Martin Reservoir State Park or up north a ways at Adobe Creek Reservoir.”

“I’ll find you,” Robert replied. “Ready to go?”

“I guess as ready as we’ll ever be,” Ron replied.

The group ended up at Adobe Creek Reservoir. It was a Colorado State Park and remote enough to suit them. The reservoir had ample fish and they found a suitable area to set the homes they’d stolen in Pueblo. By Sunday night they had all of the homes

leveled and powered. They still had to set up the radio towers and the wind turbines but the 3 generators gave them enough power to get by.

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Saturday, February 17, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

One radio tower and the 3 wind turbines were up, allowing them to cut back to a single generator. All of the battery backups to the wind turbines were stored in a single 40' trailer and some rewiring had been done to allow them to distribute power to their new enclave from the back of the trailer. Some of the folks had made a second trip and come back with additional trailers. One was set up as a medical clinic for Derek to do his advanced first aid from. They had done a little hunting during some free time and had added a couple of deer to their food stores.

"I was thinking that it might be a good idea for us to harvest logs and build one of those old fashioned log forts," Rob suggested.

"Jeez, when you started off talking about logs, I was afraid you were going to suggest we build log cabins," Gary laughed.

"It may come to that in a couple of generations, so don't laugh," Rob said. "Half of this reservoir lies in Kiowa County and half in Bent County. It appears that we're pretty much right on the south side of the line in Bent County. We should probably build an icehouse and store some of that ice from the reservoir."

"At least we'll still be armed in a couple of generations," Gary said. "We have cross-bows, bolts, tomahawks and spears."

"In addition to the icehouse," Rob continued, "We need to be thinking about finding some livestock come spring. This is Colorado so we shouldn't have too much trouble finding saddle horses."

"Be sure and get one name Salina for Gary," Clarence chuckled.

"The problem with farm tractors," Rob continued, this time ignoring Clarence instead of Gary, "Is that they break down. So we should probably see about getting some draft horses and some horse drawn farm equipment."

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After the meeting, The Three Amigos gathered in Ron and Linda's trailer for coffee.

"That Rob is so serious," Gary said. "He'd better learn to lighten up or he's going to have a heart attack."

“I’ll tell you one thing,” Ron said. “There are some supplies that we have that we’re going to run out of after a while. I’m thinking that we should be hitting some of those cities and stocking up.”

“Things like what?” Gary asked.

“Coffee and cigarettes, for one thing” Ron said. “Ammo for another. I don’t relish the idea of hunting deer with a spear.”

“I think we need to be thinking about some practical items too, like hands tools and such,” Clarence added.

“Sometimes I wonder if the struggle is going to be worth it,” Ron said.

“Ron we have a few good years left in us and we’re going to need that time to share all the information we’ve accumulated over our lifetime to our kids,” Gary suggested. “Plus some folks don’t really pay much attention to the things they do. For example, I asked and they did nothing to stabilize the diesel fuel. We ought to be out scavenging and getting all the fuel we can find and stabilizer we’ll ever need. Hell, I made a whole list of things we need to add to this small group as badly as we need to build a fort. I think we should talk to Rob about a division of responsibilities. We can do the scavenging and they can do the building.”

“They aren’t doing no building until we scavenge them up some chainsaws,” Clarence laughed.

“See, that’s what I mean,” Gary said. “Why would they want to use hand axes to cut down trees to build a fort when we could get them chainsaws and cut all of the trees they’d ever need in a week?”

“I’m the oldest so I’ll go talk to Rob about it tomorrow,” Ron suggested.

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Sunday, February 18, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

“So you see Rob,” Ron continued, “We need to divide up the responsibilities around this place and get everyone doing what they’re good at.”

“I suppose you 3 are the sneakiest SOBs, I’ve ever met,” Rob smiled. “You go ahead and scavenge and we’ll do the building.”

“Get together a list of the things you want first and we’ll start tomorrow,” Ron suggested. “We’re going to start off by getting you guys some chainsaws and maybe a trencher so you can build the fort. We’re also going to pick up some hand tools plus some of the things we want for ourselves, like coffee and cigarettes.”

“I’ll have a list for you in the morning,” Rob agreed.

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“He agrees so we’re all set, Gar-Bear,” Ron reported.

“I want to get to Pueblo tomorrow, Ron,” Gary said. “There are 5 gun stores in that town and there are some things I most definitely want.”

“We can each take a pickup and find some trailers at the U-Haul place,” Clarence suggested.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Seventeen – Scouting Colorado

Monday, February 19, 2007, Pueblo, CO...

The first stop was at the U-Haul business where The Three Amigos each attached the biggest trailers they could find to their trucks. The second stop was at a store that sold chainsaws and they picked all the new ones they could find plus oil and repair parts. Their third stop was at a small construction company where they found a small trencher and loaded it into a trailer. Next, they hit several grocery stores and loaded up on cigarettes and all of the coffee they found. Finally they started to hit the gun stores and Gary finally found what he wanted, original Rugger Vsqueros and gun belts. He also found some Winchester rifles in .45 Colt caliber. His only remark was that if he was going to play Cowboy, he was going to be dressed for the part. They picked up some 5-gallon gas cans and some fuel stabilizer at an auto parts store and got about 100-gallons of gas for the chainsaws.

When they got back to Adobe Creek Reservoir, the Deputies and the others had the fort all laid out. The 3 old men couldn't haul everything they found in the gun stores so they were going there first on the following day. They'd also noticed a cigarette store on their way out of town and were going to hit it second. Guns and coffin nails, what a combination. That list of guns stores Gary had came from his computer and before that, the list had resided on Springfield Armory's website.

Tuesday, February 20, 2007, Pueblo, CO...

They had a half trailer load of smokes and half trailer load of coffee. The second and third trailers and all 3 trucks were filled with the contents of the gun and sporting goods stores. When they got back to the reservoir, the trench was coming along well and a lot of jack pines or something were cut, branches stripped and laying in piles. After they unloaded, The Three Amigos got with Rob to find out what kind of hardware he needed to begin constructing the fort. He wanted the longest nails, bolts and screws they could find, for starters. He also needed some sort of hinge to hang the gate for the fort. Ron had an idea that maybe they could attach clamps to logs and hinge the gate at the top like a drawbridge. It could hinge outward so that anyone trying to push on it would in effect push at the whole front wall of the fort. All they needed to affect that solution was a length of pipe and some slightly larger pipe clamps. Rob told them it was worth a try.

On Wednesday, they got the bolts and nails, pipe and clamps. They also got some ½" drills, long bits and a few 100' 10 gauge extension cords. Since they had pretty much cornered the market on cigarettes, they went back to the grocery stores and loaded up on staples. On this particular day they got the feeling they were being watched and decided that they had done enough for this week. Ron was planning on bringing Tango and Gary was going to bring Baby the next time the headed to Pueblo. Baby might not be a full-blooded Shepherd but she was mighty protective of Gary. Clarence said he'd bring Duke, one of his Rottweilers.

Saturday, February 24, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

Rob and the others had used the larger logs to build that icehouse he wanted and the smaller logs to begin to erect the walls to the fort. By Saturday, they had the walls to the icehouse constructed as well as the front wall to the fort. The Three Amigos had taken several logs and bolted them together to form the gate. They attached the pipe clamps and then backed out one lag screw and loosened the other. When they were ready to install the gate, everyone stopped and helped. The two end poles were twice as long as the others, allowing them to raise and lower the gate from the inside using 2 of the winches from their shelters that were now anchored in large cement blocks. They basically had a 1:1 mechanical advantage but the winches had a much higher lift capacity than the gate possessed in weight.

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Sunday, February 25, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

Using a large saw they began cutting blocks of ice from the reservoir while some of the people finished putting the roof on the icehouse. They had a large pile of accumulated sawdust to use as insulation in the icehouse. They worked all day and by evening had two layers of ice stored. They planned to get two more layers the following Sunday and call it good. They had no idea how long the ice would last so if they needed to change something, it would have to wait a year. They now had a central storage place for frozen goods.

In the final tally the 3 old geezers had done pretty good at those 5 sporting goods stores. They had enough M1A's to equip all of the men in the camp who didn't have a 7.62 caliber rifle. They had several cases of that Australian surplus too. Those blokes must have shipped thousands of cases of the stuff to the US when it was still a country. It didn't matter what caliber of firearm you had, they now had some ammo for it. They also added some old-fashioned archery equipment including some fiberglass recurve bows and a fair number of arrows. The impossibility of them continuing to use firearms indefinitely had been foremost in The Three Amigos minds. Gary had been reading a story called *Rivercane Arrow* on the Frugal website at one time in the past and it made the point that they needed to be prepared for a time when a fiberglass bow and some arrows might become valuable property. Buying crossbows, prefabricated spears and tomahawks were also a result of reading that story.

Monday, February 26, 2007, Somewhere in CO...

Gary had printed out the portion of the Springfield Armory list of gun dealers who sold their products in the state of Colorado and he suggested that they slip up to Colorado Springs as their next shopping spot. They did bring the dogs because Colorado Springs was much larger than Pueblo and they figured they were more likely to run into some people. Whether or not the people they ran into would be friendly or not remained to be seen. This wasn't any time to be playing Cowboys and Indians so they left the Single

Action's at home and brought the BM-59's and their M1911's. The Deputy Sheriff's graciously lent them some level IIIa Kevlar vests.

While there were only 3 dealers listed in Colorado Springs, Gary pointed out that there might be other dealers who didn't sell Springfield Armory products and there were always the pawnshops. At least the pawnshops in California had firearms; they would have to see about Colorado. Dang it was cold; Gary had completely forgotten how cold Colorado could be in the winter. About 10 miles south of Colorado Springs, Ron screeched to a halt.

"What's up, Ron?" Gary asked on the 2-meter radio.

"Roadblock up ahead, Gar-Bear, let me get my binoculars and see what we have," Ron replied.

"Click, click," came acknowledgements.

"Uh, fellas, we have a military roadblock up ahead, what do you want to do now?" Ron radioed.

"Let's try Trinidad," Gary suggested. "It's on the other side of Pueblo."

The men were bound and determined to get as many firearms and as much ammo as they could lay their hands on, all without getting their butts shot off of course. Trinidad has 7 names listed as being somehow involved in the firearms trade. All they found was a Wally World, but that suited them just fine. Wal-Mart had a lot of things they could use, if it hadn't been picked over. It seemed that the store was locked up tighter than a drum. So, they pulled around back and allowed themselves to enter. They filled the 3 trailers and the back of the 3 pickups there at Wally World. Heck, they even found some stuff that wasn't made in China. Derek should have been along to help them sort through the pharmacy, but they found a second best way and just took everything. Once they were loaded up, they headed to Pueblo to pick up US 50. The 3 dogs growled the whole way through Pueblo. After they had everything from Wal-Mart unloaded, Gary treated for coffee.

"I don't want to go through Pueblo again," Gary said. "The town gives me the creeps and Baby growled the entire time we were driving through."

"So did Tango, Ron agreed.

"Duke was pretty unhappy, too," Clarence admitted.

"Maybe they saw us looting the town," Gary suggested. "And when we drove back through, they recognized the trucks and trailers."

"Who is 'they'," Ron asked.

“Whoever is making the hair stand up on the back of my neck,” Gary replied. “From now on, let’s just take Colorado 10 and go through Walsenburg. Anyway, that’s enough for one week so let’s just stay around here and help them with the fort.”

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Sunday, March 4, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

Rob and the others had the two sides of the fort finished by Saturday night. All that was left to complete was the back wall. They spent the day cutting and hauling ice to the icehouse. Derek had sorted through the meds and looked up the ones he was unfamiliar with in the PDR his Dad had borrowed from Wal-Mart. He carefully added everything they had to his inventory records. The only place he had to store them was in the boxes that they brought from Wal-Mart, but he sorted them alphabetically, using the generic names, so he could find something if they needed it.

When they had unloaded the things they had taken from Wal-Mart, the men realized that they were getting a bit heavy on some things and they proceeded to update Gary’s computerized inventory list. Unless a demand arose for something they absolutely didn’t have, there was no reason to risk going on anymore scavenging trips. Maybe they could wait until spring to go looking for horses, or at least until the Deputies could accompany them. Unless they could find a deserted ranch with a herd of horses, they were going to need to come up with something to trade for the horses and the tack. Sometimes people don’t realize what they have that is of value to someone else. They were thinking in terms of guns or food. They should have been thinking about all of those medicines they had over in Derek’s clinic. Eventually when they found it out, they had a new list of things to look for. It all had to do with some surviving ranchers who had horses and maladies.

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Sunday, March 11, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

The fort walls were finished and had been for a couple of days. Rob and the folks were working inside building a shelf/landing about 6’ down from the top that they could stand on to defend the place. 2 of The Three Amigos couldn’t see over so they cobbled together some boxes to stand on.

“How come you fellas didn’t sharpen the tops of those wall poles like they did in the movies?” Ron asked.

“We just wanted to get it built,” Rob said. “None of us could see the point in sharpening the tops. Any suggestions?”

"We could use barbed wire if we could find some and tack on a row or two of home-made concertina," Gary suggested. "We have the staples from when we picked up the bolts. If we can get some backup to go with us, we could try Pueblo tomorrow."

"What do you need backup for?" Rob asked.

"We haven't seen anybody, but we all three had the feeling we were being watched lately," Ron explained. "The last time we went through the town we had the dogs with us and they were very unhappy."

"We still have more of the fighting positions to install on the inside of the wall, but we could free up 3 people to go with you," Rob suggested.

"Well ok, we'll make one final trip to Pueblo," Ron agreed. "But before we do, you make up a list of anything you might need."

Gary happened to mention the upcoming trip to Derek. Derek, it seems, had been studying the inventory of drugs they brought from Wal-Mart. He wanted to know if there was a Wal-Mart in Pueblo. There were 3, as a matter of fact, but the 3 old men hadn't hit them. Derek suggested that they missed a golden opportunity for a lot of supplies. He'd also been studying the drug situation and decided they could stand to loot additional pharmacies. Since they now had some empty 40' trailers, how did everyone feel about making a pass at those 3 Wal-Mart stores in Pueblo?

"This could turn into a major operation," Ron suggested. "My boys and son-in-laws give me a force of 5. Clarence and his boys make 8. Gar-Bear, you and yours double that to 16 if you include Derek. I don't think we should even consider going to Pueblo again without at least that many people."

"How many empty trailers do we have?" Gary asked.

"I think that Rob said there were 3," Clarence replied. "What's on your mind?"

"One expedition to clean out those stores of anything we need," Gary suggested. "We can get one tractor trailer and one pickup and trailer load at each of the 3 stores. We can use another pickup and get a trailer for it for the barbed wire. Rob is just going to have to suspend his building project for that day. If we're going to risk our families, he's going to have to risk his Deputies."

"It's your idea, Gar-Bear, so you explain it to him," Ron suggested.

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"Ok, Rob, we talked it over and here's the deal," Gary began. "We'll take all 3 semis and empty trailers to Pueblo tomorrow along with 4 pickups and the 3 trailers. We can pick up another U-Haul trailer and use that trailer and pickup for wire. We're going to hit all of

the Wal-Mart stores on one day and only take things we can really use. Derek seems to think we need to clean out their pharmacies so that will go in the pickup and trailer. We need you to suspend construction for one day and provide escort service. Will you do it?"

"You really are expecting trouble aren't you?" Rob responded.

"We don't know, but something is not right in Pueblo and we're going to have to have protection," Gary insisted. "We're taking the men in our families so that will make 16 of us. We need all 8 of your Deputies."

"First thing tomorrow?" Rob asked. "We'll be ready, the fort can wait."

"Good and come loaded for bear," Gary suggested.

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Monday, March 12, 2007, Pueblo, CO...

They had stayed in a group and had picked up a trailer and gotten the wire. This was sent back to the reservoir with the youngest person driving, one of David's boys. Next they started to hit the Wal-Mart stores. They cleaned out the pharmacies, picked up all of the cigarettes and coffee and worked over the sporting goods section. They also made a pass through the clothing departments and loaded up on denims, work shirts and heavy coats. Store to store, there were differences in inventory, but by late in the afternoon they had everything they figured they could use. Rob agreed that they were being watched, but no one in the group spotted the watcher(s). Clarence had both of his Rottweilers and Ron and Gary had their dogs. The dogs never did stop growling.

Gary got to thinking about something he'd been told back when he'd done his first work of fiction, The Ark. Somebody had mentioned all of those prisons in Colorado and the hair on his neck went to rigid attention. He mentioned to Rob what he'd remembered and 2 more people were to be detailed to guard their efforts. But, they got through the day without being attacked. They made certain that nobody followed them when they headed back to the reservoir. They had also checked the other pharmacies in Pueblo, and someone else had looted every one of them. The obvious conclusion was that there were people in Pueblo and they used drugs. But they hadn't been in Pueblo when the California group had first arrived in Colorado.

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Several small groups of prison convicts had gathered in Pueblo. By the time they'd gotten there, The Three Amigos had already cleaned out the gun stores. They started going through the homes in the community and rousting out the few remaining survivors. The men were used for slave labor and the women for something else. They were slowly building up an inventory of arms and ammunition from the homes but still weren't pre-

pared to operate in any organized fashion. They had been planning on cleaning out the Wal-Mart stores only to find someone at each of the stores on the very day they were going to break in. They could see that these people had them outgunned so they held back and just observed. When the people departed on eastbound US 50, they trailed them but from a very great distance. It wasn't like there was a lot of traffic on the highway. Eventually the semis and pickups turned north off 50 onto Colorado 14. The signs said Adobe Creek Reservoir. The cons headed back to Pueblo.

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Tuesday, March 13, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

The old geezers showed the Deputies how to make the concertina and that task was given to David's boys. Those coils of wire aren't really a foolproof defense, but they slow people down. In those western movies, a wood walled fort seemed to provide a fair measure of protection to the Calvary Soldier guarding the fort. Maybe against bows and arrows, it would be ok, but there was some question in everybody's mind about how well those 6"-7" poles would stop a bullet. They were hoping that the poles would at least slow the bullets enough that their level IIIa body armor would be enough. They couldn't find any of the plates in Barstow for the Interceptor vests.

By the end of the week, the fort was deemed defensible. They now had some other priorities, finding more propane for the generators, plus finding livestock and the farming equipment. It was decided that their best bet lie in traveling north and checking out the farms/ranches. They were going to take a couple weeks off, rest up and around the first of April start looking for what they needed.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Eighteen – Starting a Farm

During the following two weeks, Derek inventoried all of the pharmaceuticals in his possession and redistributed them maintaining his generic name alphabetical sorting. When he completed the project he printed out several copies of the list and kept one, gave one to Rob and one to his Dad. During those same two weeks The Three Amigos had done the same with everything they'd reallocated from the Wal-Mart stores. They did a lot of sorting and organizing and could put their hands on anything on those inventory sheets Gary printed out.

Monday, April 2, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

"What type of shopping list do we have?" Rob asked.

"Diesel fuel and propane, to begin with," Ron said. "Then we want horses, cattle, hogs and poultry. We could use a diesel tractor or two and we're going to need a plow, a disk, a drag, a combine, a corn picker, maybe an elevator and some wagons. For the horses, we'll need saddle and bridles at a minimum."

"How are we going to pay for what we find?" Rob asked.

"We do some trading, Rob," Gary replied. "We have an inventory of our food, weapons, ammunition and supplies that we can take along and see what the ranchers/farmers need. Maybe we have something they need badly enough to trade us the stuff we need to get."

"We get too far north and we're probably going to run into fallout zones," Rob suggested. "We may need to move into western Kansas, if that proves to be the case."

"We'll just take our Survey meters, like we always do and keep an eye out for the radiation," Ron replied.

"How do you want to handle this?" Rob asked. "We need to leave people to guard the fort."

"How about half the men go and half stay here?" Clarence suggested. "I'd suggest that we take Derek along in case we find anyone who needs medical assistance."

That was the way they did it, half and half. Four Deputies would stay at the fort with 8 of the male family members. Their system of deciding who stayed and who went was based strictly on age with the youngest in each of the groups staying at the fort. 12 men left that morning in 3 pickups, each pulling a trailer containing some supplies and trade goods. They also had one semi-tractor and an empty lowboy. They began checking the farms to their north one by one. On the abandoned farms all they found was a lot of dead livestock, but they did find some farm equipment that they managed to get on the lowboy. Eventually they came to a farm with some signs of life. They parked the semis

and 2 of the trucks on the road and The Three Amigos cautiously made their way to the farmhouse. The 3 old geezers got out of the pickup and just stood and waited for the farmer to react to their presence. They left their long arms in the truck but had their sidearms.

“Don’t try nothing funny,” a voice called out, “I’ve got you covered. What do you want?”

“We’re looking to trade,” Ron said. “We have 3 pickups and trailers filled with trade goods.”

“Probably stole the whole lot,” the farmer/rancher replied.

“That’s right we did, from stores, not from people,” Ron said. “Can we come in and talk?”

“Lose them guns of yours and we can,” the farmer/rancher said.

The Three Amigos put they guns in the pickup and brought out a 3# can of Folgers coffee as a token of their good faith. They picked the Folgers because its bright red can was so distinctive there was no mistaking what they were carrying.

“All I have here is a can of coffee,” Ron called out.

“You make your way to the front porch so I can check you over,” the farmer/rancher replied.

Gary and Clarence remained where they were and Ron went to the front porch. The front door to the house opened and Ron was motioned inside. A minute later the farmer called out for the next of them to come to the house. Clarence went and Gary remained by the pickup. A minute later the farmer called for Gary to come to the house. The farmer frisked Gary roughly and told him to join Ron and Clarence who were sitting at the kitchen table. The farmer opened the can of coffee and got a pot going while his wife and son kept an eye on the other vehicles parked on the road.

“What do you need and what do you have to trade?” the farmer asked.

“We need horses, cattle, hogs and poultry,” Gary said. “We could use a diesel tractor or two and we’re going to need a plow, a disk, a drag, a combine, a corn picker, maybe an elevator and some wagons. We have an inventory of food, weapons, ammunition and supplies to offer in exchange.”

“I could maybe use some ammunition and some of the store bought stuff,” the farmer replied, “But we grow our own food so we don’t need much of that. Got anything else to trade?”

“Just some stuff from some drug stores, but we didn’t bring any of it,” Gary said. “I have a list of what we have though.”

“My boy has epilepsy and he takes Dilantin,” the farmer said. “I got a bad heart and I’m out of my medications.”

“My youngest son is a Paramedic,” Gary said. “He’s out in one of the pickups. If I can use the radio, I can call him to come up and see if we have what you need.”

“Now you’re talking,” the farmer said. “Give your boy a call and tell him to walk up here, unarmed of course.”

“Derek, this is Dad,” Gary radioed. “Bring your Paramedic bags and come to the house unarmed. Nobody is hurt, but the fella here needs some prescription drugs.”

“I’ll be right there Dad,” Derek replied.

“Describe your boy to me,” the farmer said.

“He’s over 6’ tall and maybe about 170 pounds,” Gary said. “He favors his mother in looks.”

“Ruth is there a tall one walking to the house?” the farmer asked.

“He’s coming to two tool boxes,” Ruth replied.

“Those are his Paramedic boxes,” Gary explained.

“Search him good and look in those boxes,” the farmer replied.

When Derek got to the house, Ruth and the son checked Derek over very well and sent him to the kitchen table. Derek took out his bp cuff and got his stethoscope to check the farmer over. When he had finished, he asked the farmer for his prescription bottles and got out his list of drugs. He had all of the prescriptions on his list of drugs.

“Derek, it makes a difference if the boy is on brand name Dilantin or the generic so you better see his prescription bottle too,” Gary suggested.

“Dad, I have everything they need back at the camp,” Derek replied, “In large quantities, but I didn’t bring any of the things with me.”

“What do you have to offer in trade, mister?” Gary asked.

“I can let you have some chickens and a couple of roosters, one sow that’s been bred and one cow that’s been bred if you can get us a years’ worth of the medications,” the farmer replied.

“It will take me about an hour and a half to get back to the camp and return with the medications,” Derek replied.

“Why don’t you do that Derek and tell Rob to take the lowboy with the farm machinery back to the camp while you’re at it,” Gary suggested. “Before he leaves, what else do you need?”

“We could use some coffee and things,” the farmer replied. “My name is Joe, what are yours?”

“My name is Ron Green,” Ron said.

“And my name is Clarence Rawlings,” Clarence added.

“My name is Gary Olsen and that’s my son Derek,” Gary completed the introductions.

“Ok if I send Joe Jr. with Derek?” Joe asked.

“If you wish,” Gary said. “It will be ok. Look over this list and tells us what else you need and what you can offer in exchange.”

The bargaining went on for about a half hour and Derek and Joe Jr. left to get the things the farmer wanted. The farmer couldn’t spare any farm equipment but he could spare a second bred sow and a second bred milk cow. He knew where they could go to get some horses and that fella might be willing to trade a few horses for food, guns and medicine. If the rest of their people wanted to come to the house, he guessed it might be ok, but first he wanted to know a little more about the other 8 people.

“Four of them were Deputy Sheriff’s back in California where we came from,” Ron explained, “And the other four are members of our families.”

“What are things like out in California?” Joe asked.

“Pretty bad, Joe,” Clarence replied, “That’s why we came to Colorado.”

“Where in California are you from?” Joe asked. “Our last name is Martin, by the way.”

“You ever hear of a city named Palmdale?” Gary asked. “It’s about 50 miles north of Los Angeles.”

“Can’t say as I ever did,” Joe replied. “How come you fellas came from California to Colorado? You had that big agricultural region in the middle of the state.”

“I suppose it was a combination of things, Joe,” Gary replied. “I was raised in Iowa for one thing. I lived in the Denver area briefly in the early 1960’s when I was in the Air

Force. Rob, who you'll meet when he comes to the house, suggested eastern Colorado. Ron has a brother who lives in Cedar Hill, New Mexico. No specific reason, I guess."

"Joe Jr. is seeing a gal who lives on another farm in the area," Joe said. "Tom, her dad, has a string of horses. I expect that he'd be willing to trade some horses for food, weapons and drugs. As far as farm equipment goes, there are a lot of abandoned ranches when people got caught in one of the cities they bombed. We don't get any kind of news about how bad it is. What can you tell me?"

"Men coming in," Ruth said. "They're unarmed."

"Let them in Ruth and put on some more coffee," Joe replied to his wife.

"Why don't we get you this list of supplies before we continue and that will give the coffee time to brew," Ron suggested.

The supply list included coffee, cigarettes, pastas, rice, beans, flour, sugar, shortening/oil, salt, pepper and a half dozen other spices and soap. They brought the things in and stacked them in the front room. Introductions were made all around and they sat visiting and drinking coffee until Joe, Jr. and Derek returned. Derek had given them a one-year supply of drugs and promised them more. When he came back, he had a wide assortment of drugs in the back of his truck, especially blood pressure medications and medicines used to treat heart conditions.

Tom Wilson had a large string of horses that he had been planning on marketing in the spring. And, Tom had a problem of not enough feed to support the horses until he could get crops in and harvested. Tom's 1,000-gallon diesel fuel tank was also almost empty. 1,000-gallons of diesel fuel, some food, medicine, some M16A2 rifles and ammunition got them 6-bred mares. Tom had 2 more stallions and offered to breed the foals when they were old enough in exchange for more supplies. He even offered to deliver the mares if they could fill the tank on his pickup.

The remainder of the week was spent recovering farm machinery from the abandoned farms that Joe Jr. pointed out to them. They helped Joe Jr. clean out the farmhouses of any supplies the two families could use. By the end of the week they had all the machinery they could use and a lead on where they might get some draft horses, thanks to Tom.

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Monday, April 9, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

Half of the 12 men went looking for more fuel along the interstate highways. The other 6 including Derek Olsen, John Green, and James Rawlings plus The Three Amigos went looking for the draft horses. Two days of dickering and a fair amount of supplies including 1,500-gallons of diesel fuel got them 2 bred draft mares, Belgians. The kind that

Gary's grandfather used. The Belgian usually exceeds 16 hands in height and very often exceeds 18 hands. It is a docile horse and a willing worker. The American Belgian has a relatively large head and short, feathered, muscular legs and large quarters. The feet are large and have minimum feather. In America, its color is usually chestnut or roan with white or blonde mane, tail and points. Its weight averages between 1800 and 2000 pounds; some stallions reach 2400.

In the US today, there are more Belgians than all other draft breeds combined. Looking at the following reasons will explain the resurgence in draft horse fortunes, and the reasons for the remarkable success of the Belgian in particular.

1. A growing ecological awareness that some of the tools and methods of modern agriculture were destructive, causing many to seek alternatives, among which is the draft horse as a source of power.
2. An economic crunch that makes home grown power, that runs on home grown fuel, which in turn enriches the soil in the form of manure, reproduces itself plus provides a surplus for sale, and appreciates rather than depreciates for the first half of its life, look better and better.
3. Their beauty. The draft horse at his best is a spectacular beast. Once booted out at some fairs for being behind the times, they are now welcomed back as crowd pleasers. More increasingly big commercial firms are also looking to the Belgian hitch as an advertising vehicle.
4. Nostalgia plays a role, albeit a minor one. Increasing numbers of horse-minded people are finding their pleasure horse in the form of a team of Belgians. Their good disposition and willingness to work make them great favorites on some of the small part-time "sundowner and weekender" type farms that continue to increase in number.

The other team returned with 3 double bottomed tankers, one with 16,000-gallons of gas and 2 with 16,000-gallons of diesel each. Their inventory of trading goods had just increased dramatically. Joe and Joe Jr. came down and explained enough about preparing the soil that they could get started with their farming. They recommended the folks farm 160 acres and put in 20 acres of alfalfa, 20 acres of timothy (for the horses), 40 acres of corn, 40 acres of oats and 40 acres of wheat. They also recommend that they built a second fort for the livestock that had the necessary buildings like a barn, hog house and chicken coop. It was decided to save a wall and abut the new fort to the old.

The new fort was to be built to the north side of the existing fort because the existing fort faced the road to the east. So, while half of the men began to farm the 160 acres on the other side of the road, The Three Amigos and the rest of them began to build the new fort. Together, the two forts would probably cover a combined area of 10 acres. They had left a lot of room inside of the first fort for gardening and expansion. They also planned to seine a portion of the lake to harvest fish for their diet. They had many plans,

but they didn't know that those convicts in Pueblo had figured out approximately where they lived.

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Saturday, May 5, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

The 160 acres was plowed, disked, dragged and planted or seeded. The three new fort walls were completed and the gate installed and additional firing positions would be built in the coming days. They'd planted the gardens and to this point in time hadn't had any problems with outsiders. The state park had a well and that was why they built the original fort where they did. They had some problems at first with low water pressure and had finally begun construction of a wood water tower. Work on the tower continued when they weren't otherwise occupied and they were hoping to get the tower finished over the weekend.

They built the tank in the tower out of white oak for no more rational reason than that was what whiskey casks were made from. It was a bit of a problem because white oak apparently didn't grow in Colorado. The wood came from a store in Denver that seemed to specialize in the wood among others. They had to bypass Colorado Springs because the roadblock was still in place. That probably meant that one of the squirrels, Hasher, was still safe. If Gary remembered right Hasher worked at the Air Force Academy or something like that. Anyway by Sunday evening, the tank was finished and they added the water for the first time so the oak could soak up the water and become water tight.

It came none too soon. The weather was warming and people were getting out and about. That would have been fine if it were the right kind of folks. I'll get back to telling you what they found in Denver besides the white oak lumber, but for now, let's just focus on those cons that showed up one day from Pueblo. There were maybe a couple hundred of them. They only knew from the body count. The cons were mostly armed with hunting rifles, but they had some assault rifles too. What they seemed to be short on was ammunition, a fact that worked in the favor of the relocated Californians. A second fact had also worked in their favor, a good healthy dose of plain old garden-variety fear. They weren't from this part of the country and they didn't really know the area all that well. Therefore when those dogs acted strangely in Pueblo, they took it to heart and began to maintain a guard force.

When the weather started getting warmer, they increased the guard force to a 24/7 proposition. Some of their population seemed more suited for that type of work than others. John Green had some security experience, as did his sister Brenda. Kevin volunteered to pull guard duty because it beat the hell out of working. Damon Olsen was also assigned to guard duty because he was a shade on the flaky side what with being bipolar and all. Everyone else kept weapons handy and The Three Amigos insisted on wearing those hog legs Gary had found in Pueblo. When he wasn't attending to medical chores, which fortunately was most of the time, Derek Olsen and his wife Mary ran something of a long-range reconnaissance patrol. Gary had gotten the idea from The

Ark and since they were in Colorado, the setting for his first writing endeavor, it just somehow seemed appropriate to make the suggestion to Derek. They had a leg up and because of Derek and Mary's patrol, the folks there at Adobe Creek Reservoir weren't caught by surprise.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Nineteen – Intruders

Tuesday, May 8, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

Derek and Mary came flying down the road pedal to the metal. They had maybe 2-3 miles on the intruders and while Mary warned the fort, Derek went to the fields. That large heavy gate was just being locked into place with the crossbar when the intruders arrived. They must have not expected to find a fort out in the middle of the boonies because they paused briefly and then spread out to approach the fort. There was no way a group of men this size could surround a fort that covered perhaps 10 acres. Neither was there any way that the people inside could defend 10 acres.

Let's review the math involved. An acre is 43,560 square feet. Each compound was square; hence the original compound was about ~467 feet to the side. They had two identical compounds butted up against each other, but only one held people. The other compound was full of livestock but from the outside, the place looked like one huge compound nearly 467' across and 933' deep with 2 separate gates. The cons had no idea which gate to attack. So, they split their force into 2 sections and each section attacked one gate. The folks who attacked the livestock compound got no resistance but neither could they get through the gate.

The folks who attacked the residential compound got a hell of a lot more than they bargained for. They were up against the stores retrieved from Barstow. In addition to the M16's, they were up against LAW rockets, AT-4 rockets, hand grenades and M-240 machine guns. The Ma Deuces were still in the packing crates because the Californians hadn't had a chance to build their corner towers. And, there were The Three Amigos having fun with their BM-59's. They had the younger people on the ledge pulling the pins on the hand grenades and tossing them over the top while all of the adults, men and women, staffed the walls. Those 7.62 rifles were a nice addition, but this event called for firepower and that came from automatic weapons. Something the residents had in abundance but were sadly lacking in the attackers.

Ron described the scene as shooting fish in a barrel. A portion of the second section of attackers was foolish enough to begin attacking the residential compound. They joined their pals at the foot of the wall. The really smart ones just ran like hell and they managed to escape. Derek was moving up and down the ledge applying bandages to the defenders. He was very busy putting on combat dressings and starting IV's. The defenders learned that 6"-7" of wood didn't stop all of the bullets. But, it slowed them down enough that they didn't penetrate the Kevlar body armor. That didn't do a hell of a lot of good when you were hit in the leg or arm, however. The final count was wounded attackers-0, deceased attackers 117; wounded defenders-11, deceased defenders-1. Ron's son Kevin had taken a bullet right between the eyes. Linda was terribly distraught, but Ron just said, 'Oh, well'. Ron rarely showed his feelings, so it was difficult to tell if he was upset or not.

While Derek and Gary tended to the wounded, the others raised the gate and went outside. First they gathered the useable firearms and sent any surviving cons to the Happy Hunting Grounds. Next they gathered up the garbage and buried them in a hastily dug pit. Because they hadn't gotten all of the attackers, they concluded that they might get attacked again. They also concluded that the attackers wouldn't foolishly rush the compound as they had this time. Their third conclusion was that they need a layer of steel or a second layer of wood between them and the attackers' bullets. Wood was a lot easier to come by.

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For the remainder of the week and into the week beyond, they cut down large trees and used the Timberjig attachment for their chainsaw. They sawed planks 8" thick and attached them to the inside of the wall above the fighting ledge. That gave them an average of about 14" of wood between them and a bullet.

Sunday, May 20, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

Anyone attacking the fort would have to either use a large caliber rifle, say a .50 BMG, or a RPG to get through the 14" thick walls. The former seemed more likely than the latter. They had discussed these attackers and concluded that they probably came from Pueblo. However, nearly 100 of them, more or less, had escaped and if they were to attack Pueblo, the tables would be turned and they would also be out numbered. The conclusion was to maintain the patrol system and locate enough additional radios so that the people on patrol could have a longer warning time. The Three Amigos said that they would drive down to Walsenburg and see what they could find to use as an alarm. They also wanted to check out that SA dealer down in Walsenburg. They'd do that on Monday. Most of the wounds had been flesh wounds but one person had an arm in a cast and another had her leg in a cast.

All their tetanus shots were up to date so it was just a matter of administering antibiotics to prevent secondary infections and allowing the people time to heal. Derek told the 3 old geezers that they better start looking around for more medical supplies, especially lactated ringer's solution. Spanish Peaks Regional Health Center was located in Walsenburg so they planned to get Derek to ride along with them and get whatever he needed.

Monday, May 21, 2007, Walsenburg, CO...

For a small regional medical center, Spanish Peaks was reasonably well supplied. Derek replaced the IV fluids and antibiotics he used and picked up some additional supplies like more antibiotics and IV fluids plus casting material, etc. Derek also picked up some extra meds for Joe Sr. and Tom. Then they hit the gun store, which turned out to be unattended. The Three Amigos figured that they'd better clean the place out so the cons up in Pueblo didn't locate the store and better arm themselves. Maybe that

was just a convenient rationalization, but it sure made sense to them. They hadn't had any problems handing out firearms to the honest citizens anyway.

They were only gone about 5-6 hours and during that time nothing untoward had happened at the reservoir. Damon had taken Derek's place on the long range patrol and they were going to leave it that way for the moment while the people were still healing up. After they got back, The Three Amigos sat down with Rob to discuss the radio situation.

"I haven't been in that HRO in Denver since the early 1990's so I'm not sure what they have in stock," Gary reported. "Some folks told me back a few years ago that they didn't stock very much at all. But we can start there and see what we can get."

"Do you just want to take a small group and do a fast in and out or do you plan to go shopping all over town?" Rob asked.

"Look, we didn't find anything in Walsenburg that would qualify as a klaxon," Gary said. "But we haven't been to Denver and I'm not so sure the trip is worth the risk. Two or three nukes, minimum, must have hit that town. The odds are pretty darn poor that we'd even find any working radio equipment because of the EMP. It's probably going to be like that in most of the major cities. Maybe we can just get by with the communications equipment we have on hand. Hell, we can get alarms from a security company somewhere. But what I'd really like to have is the old style surface ship general alarm. I read somewhere that they made a klaxon you could hear a mile. It was about 330db."

"How many portable radios do we have?" Rob asked.

"Chris gave me back my 3 racing radios, we have 6 2-meter handhelds and 6 CB handhelds plus the mobile CB radios," Gary replied.

"We're just going to have to make do with what we have then," Rob said. "I agree with you that it's too risky to go to Denver to get radios that probably won't even work assuming we find them. We'll put CB's on the tractors and we'll just have to use different radios for different purposes."

"We still need propane and we don't have those corner towers up," Ron pointed out. "I understood that you were waiting on the towers to install those Ma Deuces."

"I was, so I guess we'd better get busy on the towers," Rob agreed. "Do you think the 3 of you can come up with more propane?"

"You know I think maybe there was an AmeriGas dealer in Alamosa," Ron said. "We'll get the propane and you see about the towers."

Ron's memory was a little better than Gary's and sure enough, there was an AmeriGas dealer in Alamosa. In case you don't remember Alamosa is on 10 and is the next larger

town down the road from Walsenburg. Before the sun set on Tuesday evening all of their propane tanks were filled and they had 3 3,000-gallon delivery trucks filled with extra propane sitting inside the residential compound. They had two tower platforms in the two front corners of the residential compound installed. The tower's platforms were even with the top of the forts walls and they had a staircase built. They were going to make these walls about 18" thick, just in case.

"What are we going to do when they realize that this fort of ours will burn?" Clarence asked.

"I guess it really doesn't take all that much to make napalm does it?" Gary responded. "I'd better bring that up to Rob and see what he thinks about that Clarence."

"Gary, we can't possibly protect ourselves against every possible danger," Rob replied. "But, we can staff the guard towers 24/7 and use the night vision equipment we got from Barstow. If we have a LRRP about 3-4 miles out in each direction on 14 equipped with night vision and radios, that's as much as we can do."

Apparently Rob had a talk with Damon and Mary and they worked out something to have coverage up and down the road 24/7 as well as having the guard towers staffed 24/7 once they were completed. Gary didn't realize that that meant that the 3 of them would get stuck pulling a daylight guard shift in the towers, but what the hell, those Ma Deuces had to be fun to shoot. It took quite a few people to man 4 guard towers and 2 LRRP positions round the clock. If you figured 4 hour shifts, 6 shifts a day, for 6 positions, that could amount to over half of their population just on guard duty. But, it beat the hell out of whatever else anyone could think up so they started figuring out work schedules to make it all work.

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Friday, May 25, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

"Gary to Ron, come in," Gary radioed with a 2-meter handheld radio,

"What do you want now?" Ron replied.

"I was just doing a radio check," Gary explained.

"I hear you too, Gary so you don't need to check with me," Clarence responded before Gary could ask him too.

"That's a big 10-4," Damon added from 4 miles south on 14.

"Roger and over," Derek teased from the 4th guard tower.

"I can hear all of you but Gary," Brenda also teased from 4 miles north on 14. "Gary do you have your ears on?"

"That will be more than sufficient, Brenda, thank you," Gary chuckled.

It was actually quite the system they'd ended up with. The guard towers had 2-meter base stations; each with their own antennas and the tower was equipped with a 2-meter repeater. They had a pretty good range because the communications tower was fully extended. Rob and 3 other guys were working to install a second of the towers to back up the first tower. Unfortunately they only had one 2-meter working repeater at the moment, but it was a little more complicated than that. The one that they had, had come from Gary and Sharon's Palmdale shelter. Ron also had one but Damon hadn't been able to figure out what was wrong with it, yet. Clarence also had a 2-meter repeater but he wasn't going to say anything to Damon until Damon announced that he couldn't get Ron's repeater to work for sure. Clarence knew that Damon had been an ET in the Navy and he assumed that Damon just needed a little challenge to refresh his military skills.

For Damon's part of the equation, he knew what antennas Clarence had installed on his radio tower because he'd helped to replace the damaged antennas after TSHTF. What Damon really needed to diagnose the problem with Ron's repeater was an oscilloscope but Damon was a bit reluctant to bring it up. He was going to give it one more try and if he couldn't figure it out, he was going to confide in Clarence what it was going to take to solve the problem. As far as Damon knew nobody had an oscilloscope.

What Damon didn't know was that The Three Amigos had a working oscilloscope buried among their various supplies that they salvaged from the Wal-Mart store in Trinidad. It was simply a matter of poor communications mixed up with a little problem of pride. The actual problem with Ron's repeater was a simple matter of replacing a damaged capacitor. Gary had acquired a complete assortment of capacitors, resistors, chokes, plus other assortments from Alltronics Wholesale in Morgan Hill, CA dating back to when he'd gotten his Ham license. (They're in Santa Clara now.)

Sharon had told him he was foolishly wasting money at the time. Lately she was rather subdued on the subject of Gary's foolishness; especially after the end of civilization. When they had started talking about moving to Colorado, she didn't say a word. Fortunately she had both of her sewing machines in the shelter when TSHTF. Plus now that most of the things they got were by scavenging, the price of the material to make her quilts was just about right. Who would have thought that Sharon's hobby would become so important? What was foolish on one day became far more important on another. Those 3 old crackpots that Linda, Lucy and she were married to had come though when it had been important. She could clearly remember telling Gary that nobody need an assault rifle with large capacity magazines. When, eventually, that had proven to be untrue, she didn't get it rubbed in her face. Maybe they were both learning.

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Sunday, June 3, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

0200...

"This is LRRP south, I have several vehicles approaching the fort."

"10-4, LRRP South."

"This is LRRP North, I have several vehicles too,"

"10-4, LRRP North," Rob said hitting the panic button that set off the alarm circuit that Damon had constructed from his Dad's assortment of electric parts AFTER he got Ron's 2-meter repeater repaired. After Clarence had provided him with the oscilloscope, it had taken him less than 10 minutes to diagnose the problem and only another 10 to affect the repair. The second tower was up and all of the equipment wired in. A simple flip of a switch activated coaxial relays and switched the radios from tower one to tower two. Each tower had its own independent 2-meter repeaters.

By the time the intruders were a mile from the fort, all guns were manned and ready and the people were on the walls. The gunners held fire until that last vehicle was on the access road to the fort. Then they opened up with the 50's and used the tracer rounds to guide their fire. Most of the MZB's never knew what hit them. The gunner on the north-east tower started at the back of the procession of vehicles and worked his way forward. The gunner on the southeast tower started at the front of the procession and worked her way back. The people on the walls opened up with M-249 SAW's, M-240 machine guns and the M-203 grenade launchers. The gunners in the northwest and southwest tower covered the reservoir.

This shooting match was all but over before the MZB's got off more than a few random shots. No doubt George S. Patton Jr. would have been very proud of the Californians this night. They raked those vehicles several times and when there was no further sign of movement the residents dispatched the survivors and called it a night. As far as they could tell, their security preparations had paid big dividends.

0900...

The bodies went into another hastily dug pit and when the pit was covered over, a group of 24 men headed to Pueblo to return the guns to their rightful owners. They encountered nominal resistance in Pueblo and after killing off the remaining cons, freed the prisoners. Derek was busy the remainder of the day treating injuries and soothing damaged souls. When they determined that there was nothing more they could do, they distributed the weapons from the two attacks and a large amount of food.

A Time Since Passed – Part I – Chapter Twenty – Moving Ahead

Monday, June 4, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

The final delivery of all the new baby livestock occurred overnight. The 2 sows produced 25 piglets in total plus they had 2 new calves and 8 frisky colts, 6 of them riding horse colts and 2 Belgian colts. Tom had been down earlier when the mares foaled in case there were complications but it all went smoothly. Joe had some suggestions about improving their herds of animals. As far as the hogs were concerned, they only need to increase their herd to 4-6 sows. The rest of those pigs could be fed up to about 225-250# and butchered. They should keep all of the heifers for breeding and could butcher the steers when they were big enough. The colts should be gelded and they could breed the fillies, eventually. Joe also suggested that he might be able to see his way clear to trading some of his new heifers for additional supplies. Derek had given Joe an additional 3-months' supply of the meds in exchange for his assistance. Joe Jr. and Tom's daughter had decided to get married.

They had assumed that Colorado Springs had come through the war unscathed. Nothing could have been further from the truth because no one had considered the Cheyenne Mountain Complex. Located on the south side of Colorado Springs just near the northern/western end of Fort Carson NORAD was a prime target for both the Russians and the Chinese. The reason for the roadblock had been to keep people out of a highly radioactive zone. To insure the destruction of the complex, multiple warheads had targeted Colorado Springs. High levels of radioactive isotopes with very long half-lives would continue to contaminate Colorado Springs for years.

"Robert should have been here by now," Ron pointed out. "How about we make a trip to New Mexico to check on them?"

"It would probably be a good idea, partner," Gary said. "Maybe we should leave our wives at home, just in case."

"Yeah, Ron," Clarence said. "They might be fine but something might have come up and we wouldn't want the wives to walk in on a bad situation."

"We'll take a pickup and a trailer with food and supplies, is that ok with you?" Ron asked.

"Naturally, Ron, and I'll have Derek put together an assortment of meds for Robert, too," Gary proposed.

They left the following day and made the trip back to Cedar Hill. Robert and his wife were dead, possibly victims of carbon monoxide poisoning or heart attacks, there was no real way to be sure. On Wednesday morning, they buried them in their backyard and put up a marker to mark the spot. This one hit Ron hard and Gary and Clarence gave Ron his space, yet remained available if he needed them. They collected the things that

Ron would want and put them in the truck or trailer. On Thursday morning they headed back to Colorado, taking their time and making note of things they might could use in the future along the way.

“We’re going to need to rethink this proposition,” Ron suggested. “There simply aren’t enough of some of the things we’d need to maintain our present way of life. There isn’t that much more propane available and what are we going to do when the wind turbines wear out?”

“You know, Ron, as a young man, I had a dream,” Gary replied. “It was probably foolish, but I wanted to get back to nature and live like people did 100 years ago. I noticed a couple of stores in Pueblo that sold wood burning stoves. They had both home heaters and kitchen stoves. I think maybe I’d like to build myself a cabin in the woods and equip it with a wood burning stove and oil lamps. I don’t think I want to go all the way back to the outhouse stage, but I wouldn’t necessarily have to do that.”

“That would be a lot of work, partner,” Ron replied, “But I’ll help you with it. It will keep my mind off of things I shouldn’t be dwelling on.”

“You want a log cabin or something more modern?” Clarence asked.

“Sort of modern. I was thinking of a basement to hold a wood furnace and wood and store our food,” Gary replied.

“We could probably put that in using block,” Ron suggested.

“We’d only really need a 2 bedroom home with a room wired so Sharon can still do her sewing,” Gary suggested. “I can put in some solar panels, batteries and an inverter to provide power for her sewing machine and my computer. It shouldn’t take a lot. I could put a storm shelter right in the basement.”

“That might be nicer than living in a mobile home,” Clarence said. “Do you think we could get 2 cabins built before winter?”

“Three cabins, Clarence,” Ron suggested. “We stuck together for a long while now.”

“How about south of the fort?” Gary suggested. “There is a nice location overlooking the lake.”

“We’ll get the kids to help us and we’ll have it done before winter,” Ron said, determination obvious in his voice.

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Monday, September 3, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

They had the cabins finished last week and had moved in. They weren't far from the fort, so in an emergency, they could run and hide behind its walls. The cabins were built on basements constructed from concrete block. Aside of powering one room upstairs for family/sewing room, the houses were essentially devoid of electricity. They were frame construction using 2x6 lumber in the walls and R-19 insulation. They used car siding to finish the interiors and a siding on the exterior that gave the homes the look of being log cabins. The basements were divided in half with a large room to store wood and a smaller one that was used for storage. The stairway to the basement was open allowing heat to filter to the basement.

The cabins were all the same basic floor plan and had a master bedroom, a guest bedroom and the family/sewing room. They had a bathroom with a small electric water heater that they could turn on when they needed hot water to bathe. The kitchen stoves had reservoirs so they had hot water in the kitchen for dishes. They ran pipes from the water tank at the fort and had plenty of water pressure, their cabins being below the elevation of the fort. All in all, they were very nice cabins and very rustic. They painted the exterior 'logs' with a fire retardant. They had taken a step back 100 years in most of the rooms in their cabins. The group was planning a Labor Day picnic at the fort and they'd driven up to the fort to join the festivities.

There's just something about home baked bread cooked in a wood stove. Sharon's rolls were quite a success. They got to talking about the need for firewood for the new cabins and they got several volunteers to help them cut up deadfalls. The Three Amigos had commandeered a wood splitter for the community and it would be put to good use. Rob mentioned that they had to convert the tongues on the wagons so they could be horse drawn. Apparently one of the two tractors they had had broken down and it was beyond repair due to a lack of parts. He said that the other one might be on its last legs too.

"If that's the case, it's good we have those draft horses," Ron said. "We can always pick the corn by hand."

"I'd sure appreciate you fellas finding us some more horse drawn equipment," Rob suggested.

"We saw some on the way back from Cedar Hill," Clarence pointed out. "It's just a matter of our going after the equipment."

"What did you find?" Rob asked.

"A horse drawn mower and a horse drawn rake plus a steam powered thresher," Ron replied. "They are antiques, but I think the only thing the mower needs is new blades on the sickle bar. There's no way to tell about the thresher until we fire it up."

"If the 3 of you will go get that farm equipment, we'll harvest the deadfalls for you and cut them to length," Rob offered.

“You have yourself a deal,” Ron agreed. “Is Tom here today?”

“I saw him earlier,” Rob replied. “What do you need with him?”

“We’d like to buy some horses,” Ron said.

“There he is over there,” Rob pointed.

“Hi Tom, we like to talk about getting some horses,” Ron said.

“What are you looking for?” Tom asked.

“One riding horse apiece, maybe a Tennessee Walking horse and maybe one Morgan apiece we can ride and use to pull a buggy,” Gary replied.

“Fancy horse flesh, but I have what you need, how are you going to pay for them?” Tom asked.

“I can pay you in gold at \$500 an ounce,” Ron replied.

“Where did you get gold, Ron?” Gary asked.

“Robert had a whole box full of plastic encased Maple Leafs in his strong box,” Ron explained.

“Well, seeing it’s you guy, 6 Maple leafs per horse,” Tom said. “Do you have any buggy’s?”

“Not yet, no,” Ron replied.

“Well, Ron, I can let you have 3 buggies and the harnesses plus the six horses for 40 of those Maple Leafs,” Tom replied. “If you’ll settle for used saddles, I’ll include them in the deal.”

“Seems a little steep,” Ron said, “I could maybe go 32 for the lot.”

“38,” Tom said too quickly.

“34,” Ron replied.

“36,” Tom responded.

“Split the difference?” Ron extended his hand.

“Done at 35,” Tom said.

“Done at 35 if they’re all bred mares,” Ron said raising a brow.

“Ok,” Tom said.

“Here’s a little bonus to get you to deliver everything,” Gary said handing Tom a 3-month supply of meds he’d gotten from Derek.

“Those saddles have bags, scabbards and a lariat?” Ron asked.

“You bet they do,” Tom smiled clutching the bag of meds tightly.

“Be sure you fill up your tank after you deliver the horses,” Ron said.

“I have more of the Morgan’s, Ron,” Tom said. “I could give you a really good deal if you took them off my hands.”

“Give me a figure,” Ron said.

“45 with saddles,” Tom said.

“Ok, 6 Morgan 3 Tennessee Walking horses, 3 carriages and harness and tack for 45,” Ron said. “Don’t forget, we need them bred.”

“First time is free,” Tom assured him.

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Tuesday, September 4, 2007, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

The Three Amigos headed out early with a lowboy, a pickup and trailer and one propane delivery truck. They picked up the machinery, loaded it on the truck and were back to the fort before sundown bringing back the equipment and almost 3,000-gallons of propane. They spent the rest of the week splitting and stacking their firewood. On Saturday they saddled up the new horses and gave them each a ride to make sure they had what they wanted.

People from Pueblo now occupied the trailers The Three Amigos had vacated and one of the guys was a farrier. He wanted \$0.50 in pre-65 silver per head to shoe the horses. Ron counted out 9 of the half dollars and paid to have shoes put on the horses. They got their families to help them and erected 3 corrals out by their cabins. The silver and gold had come from Robert’s safe. He had 50 Maple Leafs and 4 rolls, each, of pre-65 dimes, quarters and half dollars. Robert also had a large number of guns and lots of ammunition. Even in death, Robert was doing a lot to keep his only brother alive. Their horses would be wintered in the animal compound because they didn’t have a barn to house them in at the cabins.

“Well, that’s the last of the propane,” Ron announced when he parked the delivery truck. “I expect that we should get them to erect those other two wind turbines and reserve the propane for cooking and heating the trailers.”

“What about other locations?” Clarence asked. “That couldn’t be the only AmeriGas location in Colorado.”

“I have a list somewhere, buried in my stuff,” Ron replied.

AmeriGas had 16 locations in Colorado. They could scratch some of them: Colorado Springs, Commerce (Denver) and Ft. Collins, for example, were in the dead zones. Others were scratched because of their location. The odds greatly favored people in those communities having survived. These were places like Evergreen, Breckenridge, Montrose, Gunnison, Grand Junction, Craig, Carbondale, Gypsum, Rifle, Delta, Bayfield and Dove Creek. Alamosa was empty and Ron had no other AmeriGas dealers on his list. And, The Three Amigos agreed that was just too much of a risk to go where they expected to find people. Ron explained that many of the locations, like Alamosa would only have about 20,000-gallons. The locations likely to have more were all in the dead zones.

Sharon’s brother Johnny was somewhere here in Colorado but she didn’t know where and had no idea whether he had survived. Charlene hadn’t and she had no idea about Shirley. Des Moines, Iowa may or may not have been a target. If it had, Shirley was also probably dead, but Sharon could cling to hope. For whatever reason, Chris and Patti hadn’t made the trip. The same for Dick and Jason; it was anybody’s guess if they were ok. Darlene Jones hadn’t come and no amount of persuading could get Johnny’s kids to leave their mother. It had ended up just being Johnny and the girlfriend, now married, who had come east.

Throughout the winter, they harvested timber, gaining quite a pile of logs to split for the coming year’s firewood and possibly to use for cabins. The logs were sorted accord to size and the logs that might make good cabins were left long. The fatter stuff was destined to become firewood. Burning pine in a wood stove was not without its problems. It didn’t seem to give off quite as much heat as hardwood and it coated the stovepipes with creosote if the fire wasn’t hot enough. But, properly cured, it provided heat and that was what they were after.

“I would have thought we’d get more attention and be attacked more often,” Clarence observed.

“I’ll tell you, partner,” Ron replied. “We aren’t going looking for trouble and folks like us won’t go looking either. I think our scavenging days are done. Anything worth taking has to have been gathered up by other survivors by now.”

“I wonder how many people made it through?” Clarence asked.

"I'd imagine that the big cities got hit pretty hard, Clarence," Ron replied. "Rural folks had a better chance if they weren't downwind of massive fallout."

"Is that why there's a dead zone?" Clarence asked.

"Well, between Denver and Cheyenne and to the west ought to be fairly dead. Salt Lake City would have spread radiation from one to the other of those cities and a lot of the places to its east," Ron answered. "There ought to be a strip about this latitude that is clear except maybe for Kansas."

"That's dated information, Ron, the missile silos in Kansas were Atlas and/or Titan sites," Gary said. "The Minuteman III bases were located at F. E. Warren AFB, WY; Minot AFB and Grand Forks AFB, ND; and Malmstrom AFB, MT. Those Peacekeeper missiles were at F. E. Warren AFB, WY. "That's probably why there's that dead zone. I think maybe Kansas would be clear of radiation, especially away from the big cities."

"So what you're saying is that farming was a healthier occupation?" Ron surmised.

"Except for getting your clothes tangled in the machinery or gored by a bull, I'd sure think so," Gary chuckled.

"Where do we go from here?" Clarence asked.

"Our show is about over, Clarence it's time for our kids turn in the sun," Gary explained. "We'll just sit around and grow old and tell them what we know and don't."

A Time Since Passed – Part II – Chapter Twenty One – Adapting

Monday, April 7, 2008, Adobe Creek Reservoir, CO...

While the others gathered and sorted the logs through the winter, Gary, Ron and Clarence were busy making plans to turn the encampment and fort into a real village. People had continued to move in from Pueblo and some showed up from farms to the east having heard about the place from Tom or Joe. Today, they were discussing what they were going to need to do to allow for their population explosion.

"We need rules or laws," Gary said.

"We need more room inside the fort," Clarence pointed out.

"I need a nitro," Ron said reaching for his tiny metal bottle of pills.

"Clarence go get Derek," Gary urged.

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"Ron I think you're clogging up again," Derek explained. "All I can do is suggest you improve your diet and I'll give you another one of these cholesterol medications. We have plenty of the nitro so when you get the pain pop a pill."

"Yeah right," Ron said, lighting another cigarette. "Derek, I've been living on borrowed time since 1992. Like I told your Dad, this bypass of mine is going to last me the rest of my life."

"You're right about that Ron," Derek agreed. "I don't have any idea where we could find a doctor who could fix you up."

"Don't worry about it Derek," Ron said. "I plan to live until I die and after that, who gives a crap?"

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Tuesday, April 8, 2008, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

"We're going to need some sort of a ruling body to govern the place," Gary suggested. "How about a Council of Elders?"

"Who would be on it?" Clarence asked.

"I'm not sure, Clarence," Gary replied. "We could pick an arbitrary age and put everyone that age or older on the Council."

“How about 65?” Ron suggested.

“Too old,” Gary said. “That would put the three of us in charge of the place.”

“Well, if we made it 55,” Clarence suggested, “We could include some of the others.”

“Whatever,” Ron agreed.

“Ok, 55 is the age to get on the Council,” Gary said. “Now what about some laws or rules?”

“We could shoot ‘em when they’re convicted,” Ron offered.

“Convicted of what, Ron?” Gary asked. “We have to have offenses to convict them of.”

“How about we really go old fashioned and use the 10 Commandments?” Clarence suggested.

“They’re ok with me,” Ron said.

“Not so fast, fellas,” Gary said. “There are two things about the Commandments that I have a problem with. For one thing, the last thing we want in this compound is a bunch of drunks. I think that drunkenness should be a major crime”

“And the other?” Ron asked.

“This thing about adultery doesn’t recognize human nature,” Gary suggested. “How about we make consensual sex between single adults a misdemeanor and adultery where one of the partners is married a capital offense.”

“As long as you don’t include same sex relationships, I’ll buy that.” Ron agreed.

“Me too,” Clarence went along.

“I guess that gives us a list off offenses,” Gary also agreed, “Now what about penalties?”

“Shoot them,” Clarence suggested.

“Why waste the bullet?” Ron countered, “Throw them out and if they come back, then we can shoot them.”

“Next question, what type of community do we want to have?” Gary asked.

“Are we a Town, Village or Hamlet?” Ron asked.

"I think maybe a Village," Gary replied. "Although many types and organizational patterns of village life have existed, the typical village was small, consisting of perhaps 5 to 30 families. Homes were situated together for sociability and defense, and land surrounding the living quarters was farmed. That sounds like this place."

"Ok with me," Ron said. "What's next?"

"We need to write it all up and have everyone vote on this," Gary suggested. "We'll probably need more rules, but let's just take this thing one day at a time."

Gary sort of became their Thomas Jefferson except he used a computer and an inkjet instead of parchment and a quill. He wrote the entire proposal up and ran it by Ron and Clarence. When they had the thing in final form, they presented it to the community. If you considered the makeup of the community, the proposal was a slam-dunk. The settlement at Adobe Creek Reservoir became known as Adobe Creek Village.

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Sunday, June 2, 2008, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

"How about we make a trip down to Texas?" Gary suggested.

"Why on earth would you want to go there?" Clarence asked.

"I'd like to go to El Paso and to Laredo," Gary explained. "Then, we could swing over to Tombstone, Arizona."

"What for?" Ron asked.

"I'll tell you Ronald, I'd like to hit Kirkpatrick Leather in Laredo and then El Paso Saddlery up in El Paso," Gary continued. "After that, we could hit Tombstone. I saw more single action weapons in Tombstone than anyplace I've ever been to. That's where I bought my first real cowboy hat, in Tombstone. We're going to need saddles, bridles, scabbards, gun belts and holsters. I figure someday we'll be down to riding horses full time."

"You're nuts, you know," Ron said. "We have enough ammunition for our automatic weapons that those old cowboy guns will never be more than curiosity."

"So humor me, Ron," Gary asked. "We can have the gun store for the village."

On Monday, June 3, 2008, The Three Amigos and 3 of David's boys set off for Laredo, Texas in a semi-tractor pulling a closed 40' trailer. The 800-mile journey took 2 days and they had a little trouble finding Kirkpatrick when they got to Laredo. They cleaned the place out and headed to El Paso to the north.

Friday, June 6, 2008, El Paso, Texas...

So far, so good, they hadn't run into any trouble on the trip. They cleaned out El Paso Saddlery and headed for Tombstone, Arizona in the early afternoon. They arrived in Tombstone late in the night and took up residence in an abandoned motel. The next day could only be described as 'eat your heart out day' and they loaded hundreds of single action revolvers and lever action rifles into the semi-trailer. Gary found new blued Colt SAAs in 7½", 5½" and 4⅝" and he was in heaven as he started wearing his Laredoan crossdraw rig. The revolver with the 7½" barrel went into a plain black leather holster. They also picked up some reproduction marshal badges so they could have a village marshal.

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Sunday, June 9, 2008, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

In their absence, Rob and the others had begun to build a huge barn away from the village. They'd also commandeered the remainder of the section of ground they were farming plus 2 addition sections that they could use to graze the livestock. The village Council of Elders met to discuss any new business and they appointed Ron's son John as the first village marshal. They asked The Three Amigos to find them wire and posts so they could fence in the 2 sections of ground for the livestock. They were told that as soon as the 3 men had a new business establishment put up, they'd be more than happy to look for wire. But, at the moment, they were looking for a building to house their new joint venture, a gun store that dealt principally in old fashioned western firearms and leather goods.

Monday, June 10, 2008, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

"What do you fellas think that we should use for a store?" Clarence asked.

"How about one of those portable classrooms? Ron suggested.

"Where do you want to set it up, Ronald?" Gary asked.

"I think we should put it inside of the fort, partner," Ron suggested. "We wouldn't want anyone ripping the place off."

"Are we going to have enough room inside for everything we brought back from Texas and Arizona?" Clarence asked.

"If we don't," Gary suggested, "We can park the semi-trailer in back and use it as a store room."

It took them 2 days to pull in the 2 sections to the portable classroom and 2 more to assemble the new gun store. While they were in Pueblo, they kept their eyes open for wire

and posts. They were going to need barbed wire for the cattle, pig wire for the partial section that held the hogs and maybe something different for the section where Rob and the others proposed to keep the horses. A discussion ensued and once the gun store was set up, they brought back barbed wire, pig wire and steel posts from Pueblo and surrounding communities.

The following week The Three Amigos and 3 of David's boys hit the road again, looking for posts and wood to build a wooden fence to keep the horses in. This ended up consuming the rest of June and into July. They paused for Independence Day and hit the road again. Damon got elected to keep an eye on the store but everyone seemed content with their modern firearms. Eventually they brought back over 2,100 4"×6½' line posts, 8"×8" corner posts and enough cedar planks and 6"×8' cedar line posts to put in a 60" high wooden fence around the entire section that would house the horses. The massive barn was done and they had built a large hen house. Work was progressing slowly on the hog house because of the limited labor force.

The lush fields provided plenty of grass for the cattle and horses and they were putting up hay for the winter. The farm machinery was starting to break down already and those Belgian horses were getting a workout. They were using pickups to pull the wagons but that was really burning up their supply of diesel fuel. As a community, it was decided to see about getting more of those Belgian draft horses. They expected trouble because the rancher they had been dealing with had demanded and received a pretty steep price for his animals. This turned into their first encounter with a band of marauding scavengers.

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Wednesday, July 23, 2008, somewhere in eastern CO...

"I don't expect that we'll be able to buy many horses from this fellow," Clarence said. "His prices are pretty steep and we don't have much to offer."

"I know, Clarence, but we have to try," Gary responded.

"Dad, there's smoke up there," Damon said, "Is that the ranch we were headed to?"

"It is, dammit," Gary replied. "Damon, get on the radio and call for reinforcements."

"What do you want to do?" Ron asked.

"Hell, I don't know, Ron," Gary replied. "We can't just sit here while that place burns down. What do you think, should we go ahead and see what's happening?"

"Hey, his barn is on fire and there are some men shooting at the house," Clarence pointed out.

“Darn, 3 M1A’s and an M16 aren’t much to go up against that group of men doing the shooting,” Ron groused.

“To hell with it,” Gary said, “We’ll surround them. Damon what’s the ETA on the reinforcements?”

“About 45 minutes, Dad,” Damon replied.

“This thing will be over in less time than that,” Ron said.

“Yeah, I know, *Topgun* is my favorite movie, remember?” Gary replied. “All right, what do you think? How about we spread out and hit them from behind?”

“Do something, I think they spotted us,” Clarence said.

A Time Since Passed – Part II – Chapter Twenty Two – Marauding Scavengers

They were outnumbered and they knew it but they couldn't just sit on their hands and wait for the reinforcements. The bad guys were pouring a heavy volume of fire into the ranch house and the return fire had fallen off. They parked the pickup about 100-yards back and the 4 men spread out to engage the attackers. As they began to shoot into the attackers, several of the attackers turned and returned fire. The remainder continued to pour fire into the house. When, finally, no return fire came from the house, the remaining attackers turned their full attention to The Three Amigos and Damon.

Ron, Gary and Clarence were using their M1A rifles to great effect because they had their scopes mounted. Damon was using spray and pray tactics, keeping the bad guys heads down. They had whittled the number of attackers down from around 20 to maybe a half dozen when Damon called out, "I'm hit."

Clarence was the closest person to Damon and he moved over and bandaged Damon's wound that was bleeding profusely. Ron and Gary continued to pour measured fire into the remaining attackers. They were now down to 4, but these remaining 4 were very cautious about showing themselves. Then it was 3 and finally 2. The last 2 men threw down their arms and surrendered. Gary rushed to check on Damon while Ron and Clarence moved up keeping the two men covered at all times.

"I'm cold," Damon said.

"It's just shock, Damon, your brother will be here in a few minutes and get an IV going," Gary replied.

"I've lost a lot of blood, Dad," Damon replied. "If I don't make it, be sure to tell the kids that I love them."

"I will, you just stay still, son," Gary replied. "Clarence, can you watch Damon, I want a word with these two fellas we captured."

"I'm coming Gary," Clarence hollered back. "Keep 'em covered, Ron."

Gary and Clarence changed places. Gary pulled out his short-barreled Ruger and fired, killing them on the spot. That was 2 less bad people they'd have to worry about. Ron went to the house to check on the rancher and his family and Gary returned to Damon's side.

"You hang in there, Damon," Gary said. "Derek will be here in a minute. I'll get a blanket from the pickup."

Just about then the reinforcements arrived and Derek quickly established a pair of IV's. He cut into Damon and did meatball surgery immediately to stem the flow of blood. Damon had a nicked artery and Derek got it sewed up and it looked like Damon was going

to be ok. Ron returned from the ranch house shaking his head, the rancher and his family were all dead. Derek loaded Damon in the back of a pickup and Aaron and Erik stayed with their Dad while Derek headed back to Adobe Creek Village. Aaron was 15 years old and Erik was 13.

Meanwhile the others buried the rancher and his family and then gathered all of his Belgian horses. His herd was large, numbering in the 30's. They used ropes to fashion halters and began to lead the stings of draft horses back to the village. The Three Amigos hurried ahead to check on Damon. Derek had found volunteers and had given Damon 2 pints of blood. Damon's color was looking better and it appeared that he would live to fight another day.

"From now on, we aren't going anywhere without wearing vests and carrying a machine gun or two," Gary said. "We've already lost Kevin and I don't want to go through what Ron must have gone through."

"That's fine by me, Gary," Clarence replied. "That sure was one hell of a way to get a herd of horses."

"Maybe we'd better think about giving one of those M-240s or a SAW to both Joe and Tom," Gary suggested.

"Ron and I will take care of that, Gary," Clarence replied. "You just keep an eye on Damon."

"Thanks, Clarence," Gary replied, lost in thought.

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Monday, September 1, 2008, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

"There are lots of these holidays that don't make any sense these days," Ron observed. "How about we cut them back to the religious holidays or something?"

"We have to remember Independence Day," Gary said. "That's what this country is all about in some ways. I can never remember when Easter is how about we make it the third Sunday in March?"

"We can do that," Rob said, "It makes more sense to me anyway. "What about a holiday to celebrate the end of the World War?"

"When did it end?" Ron asked. "January 8th or 9th?"

"It might be arbitrary, but let's say January 8th," Rob suggested.

"What do you want to call the holiday?" Clarence asked.

“How about Deliverance Day,” Derek suggested.

“Our official holidays could be January 8th, Deliverance Day, the 3rd Sunday in March for Easter, the 4th of July for Independence Day, the 4th Thursday in November for Thanksgiving and December 25th for Christmas,” Rob suggested.

“Yeah, that’s enough,” Clarence said. “Well bring it up next Monday night at the weekly Council of Elders meeting.”

“Why bother?” Rob asked. “We have 4 votes and only need one more to make it official, I’ll go talk to Johnny.”

“We burned through the better part of a case of 7.62 ammo,” Ron said. “Either we find more or one of these days, we’re going to run out.”

“Why don’t we reserve the main battle rifles and the assault rifles for when we’re defending the fort?” Clarence suggested. “We have enough of those single action revolvers and lever action rifles to outfit everyone.”

“You bring that up at the Council meeting next Monday night Clarence and we’ll make some kind of a deal with everyone to equip them with the arms we gathered,” Gary suggested. “You guys give it some thought and we’ll make some sort of proposal.”

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Monday, September 8, 2008, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

The Three Amigos had arrived at a proposal that they thought everyone could agree with. In exchange for supplying leather, arms and ammunition to the residents of the village, the residents would care for their horses and see that they always had firewood. It made a lot of sense any way because Ron was 67, Clarence 66 and Gary 65. The Council voted on it and it was decided that since it affected the entire community it should be put to a community vote the following night. Needless to say, the measure carried 100%. So much for The Three Amigos firearm business.

A decision was made, as a community, that males reached their majority at age 16 and qualified to carry a firearm. The women suggested that in these times it didn’t make much sense to make girls wait until they were 16 to reach their majority and the community decided, as a whole, that girls reached their majority at the onset of puberty. Boys were 16 because everybody knew that they matured slower than girls.

Using horses to harvest the crops made the entire process much more labor intensive. The hay was cut and stacked onto wagons and hauled to the new barn and tossed in the haymow. They had alfalfa for the cattle and riding horses and timothy for the draft animals. Timothy was used to keep the animals from floundering. All of the buildings

had been completed over the course of the summer and as fall set in, it was time to butcher. But, before they did that, they needed to give some consideration to expanding the community icehouse. With as much meat as they were producing, the icehouse simply wasn't big enough.

They built a second icehouse about the size of the first. Because the ice seemed to lose about 3 layers over the summer, they had enough room in the old icehouse for this year's slaughter except for the chickens that could be slaughtered as needed or after they had ice for the new icehouse. The meat was divided into primal cuts and the hams and bacon brined and smoked immediately. The village now had a butcher shop and a butcher from Pueblo cut the retail cuts of meat for the folks using a knife, cleaver and handsaw. They moved a walk-in refrigerator from Pueblo to hold the meat while it thawed so he could cut it. Understand, most of the meat was beef, pork and chicken.

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Thursday, November 27, 2008, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Quite honestly the people there at Adobe Creek Village had never really gotten into raising turkeys. Thanksgiving dinner consisted mostly of chicken, beef and pork roasts. The hams wouldn't be ready until Easter and they just made do with what they had. Nobody went hungry; that much was certain. Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter were the family holidays and Deliverance Day and the 4th of July were community holidays. There was Christmas coming up and The Three Amigos had something very special in mind for the people of Adobe Creek.

On Monday, December 1, 2008, The Three Amigos departed from Adobe Creek on a trip shrouded in secrecy. Their wives knew where they were going but were sworn not to say a word. The men headed to Phoenix and Ventura, California. They figured that even though they'd bought a lot of stuff from Cold Steel, there was still much more to get. They also wanted to swing through Palmdale and see how Chris and Patti were doing. They hit Palmdale on their way to Ventura and nobody in Palmdale was doing very well. Ron, Gary and Clarence persuaded them to move to Adobe Creek and told them to get their things around and they'd pick them up on the return trip.

Ventura is just north of Oxnard and Oxnard is where one finds Port Hueneme Naval CBC. Just down the road a bit further is the Navy's Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division at Point Mugu. As a result of realignment actions taken in 2000, the base is now part of Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC), a consolidated organization that includes the former Construction Battalion Center, Port Hueneme and Naval Air Station, Point Mugu. The Point Mugu installation commander now reports through a consolidated regional organization rather than through NAVAIR channels. The change in chain of command for the installation was due to movement of the E-2 wing to NBVC from NAS Miramar; under the CINC Pacific Fleet/COMNAVAIRPAC organization all installations are now under regional commanders who report to the CINC. The T&E range organization remains under NAVAIRSYSCOM. Because of this and earlier realignment actions,

this installation no longer hosts the RAC function. A Command Airspace Liaison Officer (CALO) serves at Pt. Mugu, subordinate (in that function) to the RAC at China Lake.

In December 1988, after more than six decades of Air National Guard flying tradition in the San Fernando Valley, the 146th Airlift Wing began moving from Van Nuys ANGB to a brand new facility, built on Federal land leased to the State of California, adjacent to the Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, an active duty Navy flying installation. Located in Ventura County near the cities of Oxnard and Port Hueneme, Channel Islands Air National Guard Station was constructed at a cost of more than \$90 million dollars, and is widely recognized as one of the newest and best flying facilities in the Air National Guard. The buildings, hangars, flight line, and grounds feature state-of-the-art design and construction. The 146th operates from the military airfield at the Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, along with Navy and other Federal aviation activities.

To say that Ventura was in a state of disrepair would be to seriously understate the problem. They found the Cold Steel facility all right, or what was left of it, and loaded the trailer and the pickup to nearly overflowing. They left nothing behind that was of any value and returned to Palmdale. When they got back, they found Chris and Patti packed and ready to go. Dick and Darlene were a couple and had packed too. The Three Amigos passed out knives, single action revolvers and lever action rifles. They explained how things worked at Adobe Creek and the caravan headed east. Their trip brought them through Barstow and they stopped at the Marine Corps Depot and loaded an empty truck that was sitting there. Barstow was gutted but they found ammunition and it was what they needed the most. They arrived back at Adobe Creek Village on Friday, December 5th. Sharon was so happy to see Patti that she baked monkey bread for 3 straight days. Gary might just have well not existed during those 3 days but when the girls weren't looking, he got some of the monkey bread to share with Ron and Clarence.

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Thursday, December 25, 2008, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

The Three Amigos were very popular this Christmas when they gave every adult male a knife from Cold Steel. The ladies received Cold Steel Kitchen Classics set of 12 knives in an oak block. Things were slowly changing in Adobe Creek Village and some of the men now sported clothing made from elk hides. There was no finer gift a man could receive than an elkskin shirt and pants. The properly tanned elkskin was very, very soft. The nicest thing a man could give his wife was a bolt or partial bolt of cloth. The Three Amigos services as scavengers had been very much in demand leading up to Christmas this year. There weren't a lot of the elkskin outfits but when people saw how nice they looked, one began to suspect the elk herd was in trouble.

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Thursday, January 8, 2009, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

The Deliverance Day celebration was held in the fort. Rob and the others had erected a tent because they had no community building. Fires burning in barrels arrayed around the large tent provided heat. This time next year, they intended to have some sort of permanent community building, perhaps in the livestock compound after they moved the horses to the new field and barns. They had already moved the cattle and hogs and as soon as they completed the board fence for the horses, they would move them too. That would free up the livestock portion of the fort and maybe they could even knock down the wall between the residential and livestock portions of the fort and use the logs to build a new community building. Ron wasn't feeling well and Linda and he left early. Clarence was the life of the party, however.

Friday, January 9, 2009, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

"How come you left early, Ron, that angina bothering you again?" Gary asked.

"Nothing I can do about it, partner," Ron grimaced.

"The hell you say, Ron," Gary snapped back, "You could watch your diet better. Hell, Clarence here is doing everything Derek tells him and he's the picture of health."

"Did you do your nebulizer today?" Ron asked. "You sure seem to be wheezing pretty badly."

"Don't worry about my wheezing, I've been wheezing for years," Gary replied. "I forgot to do my nebulizer but I can do that when I get home. On the other hand, if you don't start watching what you eat, you're going to drop dead one of these days."

"I watch every bite I eat all the way from my plate to my mouth," Ron laughed. "Lighten up partner. I'm going to live until I die."

"I guess that's what I'm afraid of," Gary admitted. "What am I going to do when you finally succeed in killing yourself?"

"Oh, don't worry about it, you'll still have Clarence," Ron said. "We can't live forever and none of the 3 of us is going to. All you can hope is that you outlive your kids. You got pretty lucky both with Damon and with Derek. Count your blessings partner."

"I'll go home right now and do the nebulizer, but would you try to watch your diet a little?" Gary replied.

"He's right Ron, you're going to end up eating yourself to death," Clarence agreed. "Or the 3 of us are going to end up smoking ourselves to death, one way or the other."

“Clarence, I’ve been smoking since I was 9 years old and I’m not about to quit that either,” Ron laughed. “You know dang well that Gary’s neuropathy has been killing him since he lost the source of those pills he was taking for his feet.”

“He’d never admit that and you know it,” Clarence replied.

“And I’m not likely to change my eating habits either, so the two of you might just as well get used to it,” Ron said.

“I know but I don’t have to like it,” Clarence said. “I’ll see you later Ronald, I’ve got to be getting myself home.”

“Ciao,” Ron said.

“They are both right and you know it Ronald,” Linda pointed out.

“Maybe, Lyn, but with Robert gone and Kevin gone, I’ve sort of lost some of my zest,” Ron admitted.

“That’s no reason just to lie down and die,” Linda said.

“I’m not,” Ron disputed.

A Time Since Passed – Part II – Chapter Twenty Three – More Cons

Saturday, February 14, 2009, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Ron was feeling much better a month later and they combined Damon's birthday, Sharon's birthday and Valentine's Day into a major family celebration. Sharon's family had been blessed with longevity and at 62, she was in better health than at any time in her life. She'd always had her miseries, but Derek had stumbled onto an herbal remedy for her migraines and with those gone, she was a happy camper. She confided in Linda and Lucy that she was actually glad that their husbands had been such survival nuts. By this time she was busily engaged in teaching quilting classes and trying to teach other people her secrets to homemade bread. In the Olsen household when Sharon was happy, everyone was happy.

One of the residents who had joined the growing group at the village made homemade truffles and the 3 old geezers had surprised their wives with 2# boxes of candy. Candy had become a rare treat and it was the perfect gift on this Valentine's Day. It should be noted that winter was especially bad this year and Gary was heard talking about the snow being up to the chin of his 9' Indian. This year compared favorably with the winter of '48, he claimed.

Anyway, the candy was given early in the day and by evening there was a devil's food cake to make it a perfect day. The 3 couples had gotten together for supper and it was homemade sausage links, thin crispy fried potatoes and home canned green beans for supper followed by a slab of the cake and a freshly opened can of coffee for dessert. The whole meal was a real lip smacker and Gar-Bear was calling the cake *musty*, as in must have another slice.

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Saturday, March 21, 2009, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

The next occasion that the cake appeared was Gary's 66th birthday combined to celebrate Derek's 35th birthday. Derek's birthday was the 19th and Gary's the 23rd so they split the difference and had a major family doings. Damon had fully recovered from his wounds but he didn't carry the scars as Derek did. There was also Britney's engagement to celebrate so they did the day up right. Britney was born in '91 and they were beginning to worry she end up being a spinster what with her being 18 years old and still single. Sharon passed along her rocking chair from the Amana Colonies in hopes that she'd soon have another grandchild, actually great grandchild.

Ron and Gary had been spending considerable time these days using hones on the working parts of their SAA's and they had them just about perfect. They had a nice crisp let off on their triggers that was a shade lighter than normal. While Gary's feet gave him fits with the neuropathy, there was nothing wrong at all with his gun hand. Josh rather clung to his grandfather and had a real interest in firearms. He was only 6 years old but

he did admire his grandpa's leather and guns. This earned him one of this grandfather's lectures about the safe handling of firearms and a suggestion that maybe someday the guns would be his.

Easter had been the previous Sunday and they all got a ham for the celebration. They seemed to have a handle on curing the hams and bacon and this particular venture was deemed a major success. Because their cattle herd was increasing, it appeared that the coming year with see them with a fair amount of beef.

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Saturday, May 2, 2009, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

The snow was gone and the men of the village had been in the fields getting that section of ground ready to plant. A crew had finally finished the wood fence for the horses and they had been transferred out of the livestock compound at the fort. The Three Amigos had spent the week helping to dismantle the wall that separated the two sections of the massive fort. Most of the manure had been hauled and the remaining soil seemed to really be a rich resource for gardening. The timbers were being stacked either to use in the construction of the proposed community building or as firewood. With the dwindling supply of propane, it would probably be turned into firewood. The supply of wood burning stoves was beginning to prove very useful as the propane began to disappear. The village was now up to 35 families and when Britney got married, it would slip to 36. Although they had defined when their children reached their majority, it would be a while in implementation. It was a lot easier to make a rule than it was to live with it.

The military had apparently abandoned guarding Colorado Springs because six families showed up at Adobe Creek seeking admittance. They were military families and each had their own 70' mobile home. They also had their issue weapons and all of the proper paperwork showing honorable discharges and paperwork to cover the possession of their issue weapons and ammunition. Their explanation was simple, but alarming. The Army units stationed at Ft. Carson had been dismantled. They had other news and it was even more alarming. There was no government in Washington, Mt. Weather or anywhere else. Mt. Weather had taken several direct hits, probably Russian, and the people who had traveled there for safety hadn't been heard from since. Finally, when the stores of food and what they could scavenge had run out, the commanding general had been forced to discharge the Ft. Carson survivors.

They not only had their personal weapons and issue weapons, but some extra weapons and ammunition. They had used military aircraft to scout the area and had located several surviving or, as in the case of Adobe Creek, new communities. They had also identified several bands of people who they assumed were the criminals. A small contingent had remained at Ft. Carson to distribute additional arms and munitions if the military folks found and were admitted to a community in short supply. Derek reviewed the papers and said they were in good order. While the story stretched credibility, the families were admitted. True to their word, they offered to return to Ft. Carson and acquire such

additional weapons, ammo and parts as the residents of Adobe Creek felt they needed. A contingent left a few days later made up of 4 of the soldiers and 4 of the residents. They returned with additional linked .50 cal and 7.62 cal ammo, hand grenades, M203 and 40mm grenades and an Mk-19 with 5,000 rounds. Their 5.56 cal was in short supply and their 7.62 cal unlinked ammo non-existent.

One of these new residents was an armorer and he was assigned to service the weapons belonging to Adobe Creek. The others offered to raise a tower in the center of the fort to provide an appropriate firing platform for the Mk-19. They used some of the logs that came from taking down the dividing wall and several freshly cut pines for corner posts. The new tower was raised 20' higher than the corner towers and had a clear field of fire in every direction.

The new troops also volunteered to take over security of the village. The Council of Elders discussed the offer and concluded that these folks were too much of an unknown commodity to hand over their security function to. They told the new people that in time, when they got to know them better, they'd reconsider. The soldiers didn't seem to be offended and offered to work on the farm instead and to be a reserve component to the village security force. It was explained that they already were a part of the reserve force that included everyone in the village. One other thing the soldiers' were able to provide was MICH helmets and Interceptor vests with plates, a very welcome addition.

Because of the tragedy with the horse farmer and his family, all of the men now went armed with at least a sidearm. The Three Amigos issued the new soldiers single action revolvers and lever action rifles for hunting. They had long since run out of the Laredo Bowie knives but they had a fair number of other Cold Steel knives to offer. One of the soldiers, an old time Sergeant, wanted to know if they had any of the Vietnam era tomahawks. He came away very pleased. He offered to teach a class in the proper use of the tomahawk and his offer was readily accepted.

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Saturday, July 4, 2009, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

The new community building in the former animal compound was the scene of the 4th of July celebration. With all of the bad luck they'd had with holidays over the years, they maintained a minimal guard force and kept LRRP's out to warn of danger. They didn't believe that there was any such thing as being too cautious. At least they didn't get attacked on this holiday. That came a few weeks later.

"Wednesday, July 22, 2009, Adobe Creek Village, CO..."

"This is the south post. I have a large group of intruders moving up 14 on the road. No vehicles sighted," the call came.

"Roger, Romeo-Tango-Bravo," was the answer.

The alarm circuit was activated immediately and the folks began to stream into the fort. They had ample time because these attackers were on foot. The LRRP's rode their horses back to the village and it became a waiting game. Maybe two hours later they could see people moving in and positioning themselves to attack the fort. Another hour of waiting ensued without much of a target the defenders could attack. Then it began, in the form of sniping. These attackers obviously weren't amateurs and anyone who could survive the 2½ years since WW III obviously had their act together. However they were only attacking the fort from the front and left themselves open to a flanking maneuver.

Those six soldiers and a few others decided to slip out the back gate of the fort and flank the attackers. They took M16A3s/M203s and split into 2 6-man groups, one went north and one went south. An occasional burst from a Ma Deuce, M-240 or SAW was used to keep the attackers heads down but the fire amounted to little more than spray and pray.

"I may die of old age before this is over," Ron said to Gary.

"It's just a good thing that we had enough of the M4-FA's to go around, Ron," Gary replied. "This could take all day, you know."

"Once we get them taken care of, we should have a pretty good collection of sniping rifles," Clarence suggested.

"We're going to have to come up with some scheme to keep this from happening again," Ron added. "We should have brought those mines from Barstow."

"They're just too indiscriminate, Ron," Gary said. "We'd probably kill more of our kids than attackers."

"Do you have a better idea?" Ron asked.

"Did you see any Claymores the last time we were in Barstow?" Gary asked.

"Nope."

"Maybe we could get some from Ft. Carson," Clarence suggested.

"We can ask when this thing is over," Gary suggested.

"Darn it, not now," Ron said reaching for his nitro.

"Derek, Ron is having another angina attack," Gary radioed.

Derek and 3 others came with a litter and they took Ron to the medical clinic. After listening to Ron's heart, Derek had started an IV with ringers and had given Ron some

Morphine for the pain and Sodium Bicarbonate to counteract the acidosis. This wasn't an angina attack; it was a full-blown heart attack. Once Derek got Ron to the clinic, he added Heparin to the mix and put Ron on oxygen. He sent word to Clarence and Gary that Ron was resting comfortably.

Over the course of the next 2 hours the two groups of men worked their way towards the middle of the group of attackers, quietly killing them as they went. The attackers were somewhat grouped up at the center and the attacking defenders finally employed their 40mm grenades. The brief firefight lasted only minutes and while the defenders took casualties, they experienced no apparent fatalities. Such could not be said for the attackers. Two were kept alive for questioning, but in the end, they too succumbed to their wounds.

"Hey Sarge, I don't suppose you have any mines up at Ft. Carson do you?" Gary asked.

"We had some M-18's left over," the Sergeant replied. "Do you want us to retrieve them?"

"Might not be a bad idea," Gary said. "We could rig them with the electrical detonators and put a control panel in the tower with the Mk-19."

"I think while we're at it, we'll bring back some bolt on armor kits and give that tower better protection," the Sergeant said. "I saw we took at least one casualty in the tower."

"Damon was up there," Gary told Clarence. "Derek get your ass to the Mk-19 tower, we have a man down."

Derek came running and was up the tower in a heartbeat. This time there would be no meatball field surgery to help Damon. A round had taken Damon in the throat and blown out his spine as it exited. Gary came to in the clinic in a bed next to Ronald. His diagnosis was a transient ischemic attack (mini-stroke). This is a brief interruption of the blood supply to part of the brain that causes a temporary impairment of vision, speech or movement. Usually, the episode lasts for just a few moments, but it may be a warning sign for a full-scale stroke. His prognosis was fair to good. They buried Damon next to Kevin and Derek let both men out of the clinic hospital long enough to attend the funeral. Derek also thought it prudent to double his father's dosage of anti-depressant to 200mg of Zoloft.

Derek and Damon had been very close. As little boys, they had lived with Gary and Sharon but a campaign by their mother to stir up discontent in the new family had worked and eventually Gary had been forced to relinquish custody. This was one of those cases where the boys had learned about God's sense of humor. They were closely bonded in an attempt to live with an overly strict mother. Damon was more closely bonded to the mother than Derek and when she'd passed away a few years earlier from lung cancer, he'd never been the same. It was about this time that his bi-polar disorder came pushing its way to the surface. Aaron became the head of the family, him being

16. Erik wasn't that far behind at 14. Britney hadn't had a chance to tell her father she was expecting.

When the party returned from Ft. Carson, they had enough of the bolt on armor kits to protect all 7 towers. Two had been added to the far end of the former animal compound. The Claymores were placed in two locations. One was up against the fort and a second group nearer the road right about where those snipers took cover. They also dragged a dozer with a blade back from Pueblo and graded the ground smooth between the fort and the road. Some things, it seemed, were only learned through experience. The more painful the lesson, the better it was learned. In the final analysis, that armor wouldn't have helped Damon. The only thing that would have made a difference was bulletproof glass. They got some of that from Pueblo but even then, it was of little value because they had to lower it to fire the weapons.

"I never stops hurting, Gar-Bear," Ron said. "You're just going to have to move on. You've got 3 fine grand children from Damon and Lyn tells me Britney is expecting."

"Unlike my father, I have my grief in place," Gary responded. "When Roger died, Dad's whole world just stopped. Counting all of Lorrie and Amy's kids, we have 13 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren plus one on the way. I somehow think that Derek will outlive a lot of people in his generation."

"Derek say's that I'm pretty clogged up, you know," Ron said. "It just keeps getting worse."

"I know what you mean, partner, I'm up to 4 nebulizer treatments a day," Gary replied. "They really seem to help. I'll start getting worried when they don't."

"Hell, Clarence has diabetes and a bad heart," Ron said. "That old fart will probably out live both of us."

"You heard who these guys were that attacked us?" Gary asked.

"Clarence said he thinks they were some more of those cons," Ron replied.

"There's not much difference between them and the people who killed our horse rancher," Gary opined. "They all deserve to be put 6' under."

A Time Since Passed – Part II – Chapter Twenty Four – Interesting Times

With Ron and Gary out of the hospital/clinic, they were spending lots of time riding the horses and enjoying the view. Derek had very strict that Ron should do no manual labor. Gary, it seems was fine and all of his medical conditions well under control. Clarence had needed to be started on insulin and they had a large supply left over from Kevin who had been a type I diabetic. With all of the building projects completed, they had more than enough help in the fields. The 3 old geezers were pressed into service riding the fence line because they seemed to have one or two head of cattle missing. The Council of Elders had decreed that rustlers would be shot on sight.

Apparently the reasoning was that if a man needed food for his family, he could ask. The village had never turned a hungry person away without a meal and something to tide them over. Several times they'd even fed people who they suspected were bad guys. This was all in keeping with the views of the village, which now identified itself as a Christian community. The missing cattle had turned out to be steers. A missing heifer was a greater cause for concern because that was their breeding stock. They'd trailed the spoor about 4 miles until the rustler took to the highway. From that point on, they lost the trail.

With the completion of the community building they commenced to hold non-denominational church services every Sunday morning. Derek was the lay preacher because he had once attended college intent upon becoming a minister. A youthful indiscretion had resulted in the pregnancy that had produced DJ. It had also ended Derek's college career and he'd ended up in the Army. Derek had been sent to Korea and the word was that his wife couldn't wait to be indiscrete with his best friend. 13 months later, he'd returned from Korea to be handed divorce papers. The wife had ended up with DJ and dumped him on her parents so she could continue to run around. Derek had been unsuccessful in his many attempts to secure custody of DJ until Junior had relented and let DJ go to California with his father.

Also during July they began the second cutting of hay to put up in the barn. If the weather held, they hoped to get a third cutting. After the alfalfa, they were going to have to look to the timothy, oats, wheat and the soybeans. The last thing they'd harvest would be the corn. The garden produced a bumper crop this year probably due to the richness of the soil in the former livestock compound. They pulled Gary and Clarence off fence riding and sent them looking for more jars and lids. They found lids, but no jars so it was decided to blanch the vegetables and freeze them. This became a turning point in the preservation of the vegetables because canning lids were in short supply after this year's harvest. They concluded that they would need yet another icehouse before the coming year's harvest. Consequently they built a third icehouse so they would have someplace to store the ice in the winter. The new icehouse was twice the size of the others, doubling their storage space.

One thing that had come out of Damon's death was the realization that even body armor provided only partial protection. Derek was quite aware of the fact but the others

had to see it themselves to appreciate the problem. They even considered ballistic face shields but concluded that even at level IIIa it wouldn't have helped Damon. It was just the luck of the draw and his number had come up. And, true to his word, Gary didn't dwell on the death of his son. The consensus was that those Claymore mines were as much as they could do to improve their security.

Just when they'd thought it was going to be a peaceful year, the attack by those cons came. They could only hope that this would be the last of the attacks. Gary excused himself a couple of times during the picnic and motored his wheelchair back to their cabin for another nebulizer treatment. And, when no one was looking, Ron was popping more of the nitro. In summary, there had been 4 attacks, 2 by the cons early on, the attack on the horse ranch and this latest attack. The only law and order was what they provided for themselves. At the last Council of Elders meeting they'd authorized John Green to have 4 reserve deputies in case things got out of hand. More people had increased the potential for trouble but since no alcohol was permitted it was a fairly peaceful community.

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Monday, September 7, 2009, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Although Labor Day was no longer an official holiday, traditions died hard. Most of the village took the day off and they held a picnic in the woods to the north of the fort. Gary and Clarence still rode fence line to keep the rustlers away but Derek had now excused Ron from all duties. Nevertheless, The Three Amigos all turned out for the Labor Day picnic. Their normal banter had most of the residents in stitches and they couldn't believe that Clarence, Ron and Gary hadn't rehearsed the whole thing. But for those who knew them, there was an edge in the banter that had never been there before.

As the year wore on, they finished the harvest and when the first snow came, they moved the herds of livestock to small fenced pastures closer to the barn and discontinued fence riding. Thanksgiving seemed to come early and Christmas passed with the distribution of mostly homemade presents. Then came the Deliverance Day celebration set to be held in the new community building.

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Friday, January 8, 2010, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

"All things considered, we've had a pretty good run, Gar-Bear," Ron said.

"I'll say we have, Ron, our preparedness really paid off," Gary replied.

"I've been feeling better lately, do you think I could get Derek to let me get back to riding the fence line?" Ron asked.

“Well, if you’re feeling better this spring, I don’t see why not,” Gary replied.

“You’re wheezing with every breath you know,” Ron pointed out.

“No big deal. I just increased the number of nebulizer treatments and I get by,” Gary chuckled. “Let’s face it Ron, we’ve cheated death a dozen times.”

“That’s true enough,” Ron replied. “Get me more coffee, will you?”

Ron was confined to his bed and Gary picked up their cups and headed to the kitchen to get them more coffee. He wasn’t gone for more than a minute or two but when he got back Ron wasn’t breathing.

“Linda, get Derek,” Gary yelled, “Ron’s in trouble here.”

Gary started CPR, but it didn’t seem to do any good. It took Derek about 10 minutes to show up with his Paramedic stuff and after listening to Ron’s heart no attempt was made to resuscitate Ron. Derek explained that Ron’s heart was clogged to the point that it probably just stopped beating. He had been expecting this for quite some time and Ron had been aware of his condition. Derek bagged Ron’s body and transported it back to the medical clinic where they kept the coffins. He gave Gary an injection of something and got Clarence to escort Gary home. Needless to say, there was a damper on the celebration that day.

Friday, January 15, 2010, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Gary came to in a bed in the clinic. He was totally confused but he was strapped to the bed. He couldn’t talk because of the airway down his throat and his hands couldn’t reach his mouth to pull that darned thing out.

“Since you’re awake, I pull the airway Dad,” Derek said. “Just hang in there for a minute longer.”

With the airway removed, Gary first remark in a struggling voice was, “What the hell is going on?”

“You went into respiratory distress and I was forced to knock you out and use an airway,” Derek said.

“Uh, Ron’s dead?” Gary asked.

“We buried him on Monday,” Derek replied.

“What day is it?” Gary asked.

“Friday, January 15th,” Derek replied.

“Is Clarence ok?” Gary croaked.

“Hey, butthead,” Clarence said, “I’m always ok. Sorry about Ron.”

“You my new sponsor?” Gary asked.

“If you need one, sure,” Clarence replied. “You have 11 years now.”

“Untie my fringing hands,” Gary bellowed. “And somebody get me a cigarette.”

“No smoking, Dad,” Derek said, “You’re still on oxygen. I’ll let you go home if you use your oxygen machine and do a nebulizer treatment every 4 hours.”

“Whatever,” Gary said. “What level do we want the oxygen machine set to?”

“2 liters, the same as before, but you’re going to need to stay on it 24/7,” Derek said.

When he got home, Sharon had set up a ‘sick room’ in the guest bedroom and they had all of Gary’s medical equipment hooked up to an extension cord. Derek had given him a new prescription of Zoloft, 200mg.

“You know, Clarence,” Gary said once he’d had a couple of cigarettes and had donned the nasal cannula, “Ron and I were just sitting there visiting and he sent me for coffee. I got back and he was gone.”

“Derek told him it was just a matter of time,” Clarence replied. “We’ll get you back to healthy and start riding the fence line come spring.”

“Right and I’ll ride the range with an oxygen canister strapped on my horse instead of 3 LAW rockets,” Gary chuckled.

“When was the last time you had a problem like this?” Clarence asked.

“Must have been in August of 2004,” Gary said.

“Did you have to stay on oxygen ever after?” Clarence asked.

“Not really,” Gary replied.

“Hey maybe this will clear up and you can get off the oxygen again,” Clarence suggested. “We really should quit smoking, you know.”

“I will, Clarence,” Gary said. “Just as soon as we run out of cigarettes.”

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Saturday, May 1, 2010, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

"I'm back in the saddle again – out where a friend is a friend – where the longhorn cattle feed – on the lowly gypsum weed – back in the saddle again," Gary crooned.

"Gary, if I was you, I wouldn't give up my day job," Clarence chuckled.

"You trying to tell me something, Clarence?"

"How's your gun hand?" Clarence changed the subject.

Swish. Click.

"About the same as ever," Gary replied.

"Good, we got a nice bunch of steers this year so we're going to need to be on guard all of the time," Clarence replied. "You can put that gun away, now."

"Um, sorry, I forgot," Gary said. "At least my oxygen level is good enough I don't need to tote a bottle."

"Look at them over there using those horses to work the fields," Clarence said. "Sure is peaceful and quiet now that all the tractors gave out."

"Off hand, I'd say we've regressed about 125 years, partner," Gary replied. "I like the peace and quiet."

"We have riders over there," Clarence pointed.

"Adobe Creek base, this is Gary and Clarence," Gary radioed, "Send backup, we have trouble at the northeast corner of the cattle field."

Gary and Clarence both eased their scatterguns out of the scabbards and loosened the tie downs on their revolvers.

"Help you fellas?" Clarence asked.

"Nice looking beef," one of the three men said.

"Yep. We had a good crop of calves this year," Clarence replied. "Like I said, help you fellas?"

"No thanks, we'll help ourselves," one of the others said.

Swish, click, bam, click bam, kaboom. That resolved any questions Clarence might have had about Gary's losing his edge. Gary had gotten two of the would be rustlers and Clarence had cut one near in half with his shotgun. In order to claim their gear, the men were now obligated to bury the bodies. There never seemed to be a turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*) around when you needed one. Gary and Clarence stripped the bodies and dragged them to a ravine and dumped them. By the time the reinforcements showed up, they had finished covering the bodies with rocks. They'd emptied the men's pockets and gotten their guns. The pistol belts were hanging on the saddle horns of their new horses and the things from their pockets had gone in their saddlebags. Texas was buzzard country, but more and more the lofty giants were seen further and further north.

Clarence and Gary were relieved and they led their new horses back to the barn. The weapons went to the gun store and the saddles were added to the large collection of saddles the residents had collected over time. In the saddle bags of one of the men were a handful of Maple Leafs and several silver coins. Without doubt, these three men had been stealing cattle and selling the meat. A person didn't see a lot of the silver or gold coins these days.

One of the things that the people considered themselves most fortunate on was the state of their health. Hard living had most everybody in good shape, but it was more than that. There'd been many epidemics, or so they'd heard, around the United States. And yes, they still called the country the United States of America even though they knew there wasn't a central government anymore. There had been cases of typhoid, typhus, whooping cough (pertussis), West Nile virus, and mumps and measles outbreaks. While mostly confined to children who hadn't been immunized, there were enough adults getting the diseases to raise some concern.

In an effort to protect the residents of Adobe Creek Village, newcomers were now isolated for a period of 4-6 weeks in some extra trailers set aside solely for that purpose outside of the fort. They weren't treated badly, but the isolation was strictly enforced. And, before they were formally admitted to the village proper, Derek used some of his supply of DPT and other vaccines MMR to make sure they didn't bring anything uninvited with them when they moved into the compound. Although smallpox had been considered to be officially eradicated by the WHO in 1977, according to the CDC, since the vaccine has not been administered in the US since 1972, those persons who had received the vaccine in the past are likely susceptible now (as are those who have never been vaccinated). It is not known how long previous vaccinations would remain effective (~10 years), but it is unlikely that people would still have a high enough level of immunity to protect against the virus. At least, that was what Derek had learned in Paramedic school. And since they had nothing to protect them against a possible disease, like smallpox, for example, they conceived and maintained the 4-6 week period of isolation.

A Time Since Passed – Part II – Chapter Twenty Five – Mutant Zombie Bikers

No doubt the people who had taken over for Gary and Clarence had replaced the cut barbed wire. Those three men had been on the wrong side of that fence and it was very unlikely that the cattle had chewed the wire. No quarter was asked these days and none was given. Rustlers just died on the spot. Gary knew he wasn't as fast as it appeared, but when you got to draw first, you had a whole lifetime of advantage on anyone you were up against. He'd practiced his fast draw in the saddle and on foot until he was very disarming. Nobody expected an old man with a wheeze to be able to clear leather and get off a well-aimed shot in under 0.3 seconds. And he caught the hammer as the barrel came back down and moved his hand ever so slightly to get the drop on the second man. In those spaghetti westerns, Clint Eastwood could get 3 shots off before Gary could even clear leather, but this wasn't the movies.

"You ain't lost your touch," Clarence said.

"That's just because it was my idea to draw first, Clarence," Gary explained. "If any of those men had reached for a gun first, we'd probably both be dead. Nice shooting with the shotgun, by the way."

"I don't use that sissy crap that Ron and you always use," Clarence laughed. "I use 15-pellet 00 buck."

"How do you manage to hang on to the gun with one hand?" Gary asked.

"I ain't got that neuropathy crap, yet," Clarence replied.

After much review of his literature, Gary was able to determine that he couldn't use a Super Magnum barrel on his express 870 action. Conversely, he could use an express barrel on the Super Magnum action. Go figure. He didn't want Clarence to outdo him so he went to the gun store and located a Remington 870 Super Magnum 12 gauge shotgun in their stores. He looked until he found a second barrel for the 870 with a 3½" chamber. Reb Adams was the armor turned gunsmith they had working in their shop.

"Reb, I'll tell you what I'd like you to do for me," Gary said handing Reb the barrel. "Get rid of that dang ventilated rib and shorten that barrel to 20"."

"What the hell are you going to use that for?" Reb asked. "That 3½" shell will put an old man like you flat on his butt."

"Maybe and maybe not, Reb," Gary replied. "Can you do it or do I need to find a hack-saw and do it myself?"

"I'll do it for you but I think you're crazy," Reb replied.

“Clarence, how many rounds of that 3½” 18-pellet 00 buckshot do we have?” Gary asked.

“Maybe a couple of cases,” Clarence replied.

“Reb, put that barrel on this shotgun and put on one of those magazine extensions,” Gary said ignoring Clarence. “Now, Clarence, let’s go find that 3½” 00 buckshot.”

Understand, by this time old Gar-Bear was down to about 145 pounds fully dressed and dripping wet. They found the ammo in the trailer out back and brought it into the store. Gary had shot the 15-pellet 00 buck plenty of times and though it kicked, he’d survived. He proceeded to remove all of those 2¾” tactical rounds from his bandoleer and replaced them with the 3½” 18-pellet 00 buck.

“Gary Olsen you’re a dang fool,” Clarence said.

“Clarence, this Remington Express Magnum buckshot was just sitting there collecting dust,” Gary replied. “I’m not afraid of it; a little recoil never killed anybody. Besides, if I can’t handle it, I can switch to that sissy stuff you’re using.”

“Uh, huh,” Clarence grinned. “Just don’t say I didn’t tell you so.”

“Reb, when will that gun be ready?” Gary asked.

“Maybe late tonight,” Reb replied. “The only thing that takes any time is bluing the exposed metal. I’ve already got the barrel cut down and all I need to do is polish the bare spots and do a cold blue.”

“Be ok if I give her a try?” Gary asked.

“It’s your funeral,” Reb laughed, slipping the barrel on the action and tightening the cap.

Gary grabbed 2 of the 3½” shells and they went behind the store where there was a shooting range set up to test fire weapons.

“You want to go first?” Gary asked.

“I don’t even want to go last,” Clarence replied.

KABOOM!!!

“That’s just about perfect,” Gary said. “One shot’s enough, I’ll give it back to Reb to finish up the barrel. And then, I have to run home to do another nebulizer treatment.”

“Well ok, will I see you later or will it be tomorrow?” Clarence asked.

“Tomorrow, partner, I have some honey do’s to take care of,” Gary replied.

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Sunday, May 2, 2010, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Clarence noticed that Gary’s new shotgun had one of those slip on recoil pads but he didn’t bring it up. Gary did seem to be favoring his right shoulder just a tad, but he’d been warned. They were on their second trip around the wire when they saw a man slip through the fence. They loosened the hammer thongs on their revolvers and pulled out their shotguns. There were 2 of them and 1 bad guy so they didn’t call for backup. The man was carrying a rifle and when they rode up, he turned in their direction.

KABOOM!!!

It wasn’t possible to identify the body because Gary’s aim had been a little off and the man with the rifle took the full load of buckshot right in the face, nearly severing his head. Aside from the rifle and a few cartridges in his pocket, the man didn’t even have a wallet.

“What’s this?” Clarence asked. “Shoot first and ask questions after? That only works if you leave enough of the body to identify.”

“He was trespassing and turned towards us with that rifle,” Gary said.

“Yeah, but we didn’t even find out what he wanted,” Clarence pointed out.

“Well, hell, next time I’ll wait until he shoots you and then kill the guy,” Gary said. “I don’t know what he wanted, but those signs are in Spanish and English and they say, ‘No Trespassing’, don’t they?”

“Maybe he didn’t speak Spanish or English,” Clarence responded, “Or maybe he simply couldn’t read.”

“Product of the California school system, huh?” Gary smiled. “Then I’m glad I got him.”

“Not being able to read isn’t a crime,” Clarence countered.

“How many times have I heard you say what a crime it is when people can’t read, partner?” Gary asked.

“I didn’t mean it that way,” Clarence snapped.

“Make up my mind, I’m confused,” Gary laughed. “Hu’s on first?”

“Huh?”

"I think I'm going back to my other shotgun," Gary pointed out. "I hate to admit it but you were right. That sucker bruised the hell out of my shoulder when I fired it yesterday."

"What about today?" Clarence asked.

"Didn't hurt a bit, Clarence, I forgot to put it to my shoulder," Gary explained. "Anyway, I'm not so sure that 3 extra pellets made any difference."

"What was that gunfire?" Rob asked riding up.

"Rustler," Gary replied.

"You get him?" Rob asked.

"Hell yeah, darned near blew his head off," Gary said.

"Have you seen anything of the new hand I hired?" Rob asked.

"What did he look like?" Clarence asked.

"Average sized guy, carrying a rifle," Rob said. "I sent him over the fence to check out that draw over yonder."

"Average sized guy carrying a rifle?" Clarence repeated. "We'll keep an eye out for him."

"Thanks, fellas," Rob said and rode off.

"I told you that you shot too fast," Clarence said.

"Who's to say?" Gary replied and nudged Salina into a gallop.

"He's on first," Clarence called after Gary.

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Thursday, July 1, 2010, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Everyone was looking forward to Sunday because they were going to roast a pig, Hawaiian style. Just after noon they got a call from their northern LRRP.

"I have maybe 50-60 motorcycles headed your way," Jesse reported.

"10-4, Romeo-Tango-Bravo," Derek said and hit the alarm.

Gary and Clarence were at the northeast corner of the horse section and couldn't hear the alarm when it went off because the wind was in the east. They hadn't had any more trouble since they'd killed that rustler back in May and the new employee must have quit because he never showed up either.

"Did you hear something?" Clarence asked.

"Huh?"

"I SAID DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING?" Clarence asked again.

"Like what?" Gary asked.

"I don't know," Clarence replied, "I thought I heard a rumble."

"I heard nothing," Gary replied.

"Dang," Clarence said, "Did you hear that?"

"Sounds like World War IV," Gary said. "We'll flank 'em and save the village."

While the 2 men rode back to the village they heard a series of explosions and a multitude of automatic weapons fire. By the time they'd arrived, the battle was over. The field was strewn with bodies of bikers, victims of Ma Deuces and Claymore mines.

"They didn't save any for us," Gary bitched.

"Thank you Jesus," Clarence muttered.

"Huh?"

"Never mind, Gary," Clarence said. "Hey there's one over there still moving."

KABOOM!!!

"That one?" Gary asked.

"Not anymore," Clarence replied.

"Dibs on his gun," Gary quickly said.

"What's he got?" Clarence asked.

"I'll be flipped if I know," Gary replied. "It sort of looks like a Mark 1, Mod 2, Flash Gordon Ray Gun."

The weapon turned out to be a Calico model 950A machine pistol with a 50-round helical magazine. If you've ever seen one you can understand why Gary thought it was a 'Ray Gun'. The model 950 was semi-auto and the 950A was selective fire, apparently. As for other issues that Gary and Clarence were trying to deal with, what went unspoken had never happened. Nobody was perfect after all.

"Ron wouldn't have made a mistake like that," Clarence insisted.

"Oh, what would he have done different?" Gary asked.

"You knew him better than I did, so you tell me," Clarence replied.

"He would have done one thing different, come to think of it, Clarence," Gary acknowledged.

"What might that be?" Clarence wanted to know.

"He'd had shot the guy a second time, just to make sure he was dead," Gary laughed. "He always said you should never leave any living witnesses."

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Monday, September 6, 2010, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

They hadn't lost a single head of cattle so it looked like when they got around to butchering this year they have standing rib roast for Christmas. As long as Gary followed Derek's orders and used his nebulizer 6 times a day he could breathe just fine and didn't need the oxygen. The big treat today was homemade frankfurters (hot dogs) and potato salad. It's funny what you miss when there isn't a grocery store to go to. Because of the scavenging early on, they had enough beans and rice to last for several generations. Gary started looking in one of Sharon's old cookbooks and found a recipe for homemade franks. All they really took was some casings and a blender to make; plus an assortment of everyday spices. They hadn't had any trouble since those MZB's. They didn't know it then, but that would turn out to be the last attack against the village. Rustlers were a different question. They figured they would be with them forever. They really didn't miss by far.

A Time Since Passed – Part II – Chapter Twenty Six – Passing Time

Monday, October 4, 2010, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

When it had finally snowed, that 9' Indian had to get on a stump. They were caught off guard and they had one hell of a time getting the cattle and horses up to the small pasture by the barn. They didn't lose any livestock, but that was something on the order of a miracle. There didn't seem to be any perceptible changes in the weather patterns, however, so any thought they had about the Gulf Stream stopping or whatever were quickly laid to rest. It had just been an early winter blizzard with high winds and lots of snow. They put that dozer to work and cleared the pastures and moved the stock.

"I guess we're stuck for the winter, Gary," Clarence said. "If it wasn't for the trees, I'd have never made it over to your house."

"We have nothing to worry about my friend," Gary replied. "We have 20 cords of wood stored in the basement wood room and enough food to last until spring."

"What do you do with your ashes?" Clarence asked.

"Till them into my garden," Gary said. "The soil seems to be a little acidic and the wood ash has improved our production. What do you do with yours?"

"I have an ash pile out behind the cabin," Clarence replied. "I didn't know you could recycle wood ash."

"I didn't either, but I spread it on my garden as an experiment and it seemed to work," Gary explained. "The only thing is it seems to take about twice as much wood ash as it would take agricultural lime."

"It surely does seem strange living in a country that's not a country anymore," Clarence observed.

"I'm beginning to believe that WW III was the war that ended all wars," Gary replied. "If they really did disband the entire military and there's no government in Washington any more then the only governments are the states. With Denver getting blown to hell, it would appear that there is no government in Colorado at all."

"We have sure been lucky not getting any epidemics," Clarence noted.

"I guess that's why Derek implemented that isolation policy for newcomers," Gary said. "The only regret I have is that people sometimes get brought into the community and we don't get notified. It leads to accidents, if you know what I mean."

"You have some more coffee?" Clarence asked.

"We ran out of Folgers, would French Market do?" Gary asked.

"We seem to be running out of a lot of things," Clarence said. "They burned through a lot of the ammo taking out that bunch of MZB's."

"Used up more than half of those Claymore's too," Gary added. "I predict that one of these days the only ammo we'll have will be for our cowboy guns. Then they'll end up using those spears and archery equipment."

"What ever happened to all of Ron's guns?" Clarence asked.

"John, Bobby Joe, Mark and Brenda got most of them," Gary replied. "I got the elephant gun and 5 boxes of shells."

"Whatever possessed that man to buy a .375 H&H Magnum?" Clarence chuckled.

"I asked him that and his answer was that he got a good price on it," Gary explained. "I don't think he realized that Sandy sold him guns dirt cheap so she could get rich selling him ammo. Man had every oddball caliber they ever made."

"You reload, don't you?" Clarence asked.

"Well, most of the .45 Colt is that cowboy action ammo and as I shoot it up, I reload it with a few extra grains of power to use in my revolvers and rifle," Gary acknowledged. "The Legacy model 94 has a 24" barrel and a little extra powder gives me better range. If figure I get about 1,000fps on my handgun loads and around 1,500fps on my rifle loads pushing a 250 grain lead bullet. That's the advantage to the original Vaqueros being built on Blackhawk frames.

"What do you use for lead?" Clarence asked.

"Wheel weights," Gary replied. "I don't get so much leading of my barrels with that stuff and I picked up several hundred pounds back when we were scavenging."

"I have a whole pail of empty cases," Clarence said.

"And I have hundreds of cast bullets," Gary laughed. "You get your cases and some powder from the store and we'll spend some time reloading your cartridges. It will be a good winter project."

"Why do you have so many bullets?" Clarence asked.

"You shouldn't melt lead inside, the fumes can get you so I did it outside during warm weather," Gary explained.

It wasn't a lot of fun reloading the ammo using a Lee hand press and a power scale to measure the powder for every round, but it kept them busy. They loaded the ammo 50/50 rifle/pistol. Clarence had a lot of brass, he practiced, and they ended up with 250 rounds of each type of ammo. Gary told Clarence that come warm weather, they would cast the rest of the wheel weights into .45 caliber bullets.

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Thursday, November 25, 2010, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Gar-Bear had the mother of all colds. He'd been in bed for a week with the vaporizer running in the guest bedroom and using the nebulizer every 4 hours. That old oxygen machine was only putting out 80% oxygen but they didn't have any repair parts so Derek had it cranked up to 2½ liters, which equaled 2 liters at 100%. There wasn't any concern that Gary wouldn't get over the cold and get healthy again but it seemed to take a little longer each time he got one of these episodes. Modern technology was wonderful, but they were slowly losing the battle as the equipment continued to wear out. It was no wonder The Three Amigos had loaded up on spears, knives and bows and arrows. They could probably always find more lead to cast bullets, but what about powder and primers? A tomahawk made a better club than a rifle. And properly used, a spear could be a stabling instrument, a slashing instrument or a club. Cold Steel even had instructions on their website to teach you how to use a spear back when they still had a website.

They'd concluded that the government must have assumed that even in a doomsday scenario it would manage to survive and rebuild. If only Russia or China had attacked that might have been the case. They'd gotten together and ganged up on the country and that meant all of the difference. Gary had written up several scenarios back when he was writing fiction and never had he imagined a situation like this. Einstein had been right when he'd said the 4th World War would be fought with clubs. In the 3 years since doomsday, ham radio communications had slowly trickled off and stopped. Adobe Creek was cut off from the rest of the world, with the exception of their neighbors.

◦

Saturday, December 25, 2010, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

"It's good to see you up and around, Gary," Clarence smiled. "You feeling a whole lot better?"

"Fit as a fiddle Clarence, how are you doing?" Gary asked.

"No complaints."

"You never did," Gary responded.

“Never did what?” Clarence asked.

“Complain.”

“What did you get for Christmas this year?” Clarence asked.

“I did good, partner,” Gary laughed. “They let me out of bed and I found where they hid my cigarettes. Say, what do you say we go on a turkey hunt come spring? I sure do miss not having turkey for Thanksgiving and Christmas.”

“Aren’t they hard to hunt?” Clarence asked.

“It just takes patience, Clarence,” Gary replied. “It would be nice to find a nest with a hen sitting on some eggs so we could raise our own.”

“I thought turkeys were hard to raise,” Clarence said.

“They’re flighty as I remember,” Gary replied. “But since we don’t have any tractors or farm equipment making noise, we might be able to raise them.”

“You get yourself all healed up and come spring we go get us some turkeys,” Clarence agreed.

“How are things at the fort?” Gary inquired.

“The place has filled up, you know,” Clarence said. “Joe Jr. and his family moved in and we have a really big herd of horses now.”

“I figured that Joe Jr. would stay on the ranch and help his dad,” Gary said.

“Joe Sr. and Tom both died,” Clarence explained. “Some sort of influenza Derek said. The village is ok, though, what with our isolating people when they first come to us.”

“What about the wives?” Gary asked.

“Both living with Joe Jr. and the wife,” Clarence laughed. “That’s one household I wouldn’t want to live in.”

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Wednesday, May 18, 2011, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Gary and Clarence had been hunting turkeys since Monday. They killed couple of Tom’s but what they really wanted to find was a nesting hen or two. They finally spotted a hen feeding with some other turkeys and instead of shooting, followed her back to her nest. She had 10 chicks and they killed her and took the chicks back to the village. They

cooped the chicks and went hunting again the following day. In a repeat performance of the previous day they followed another hen and found her nest. She had 8 chicks that they soon added to their flock. On Friday, they went hunting one last time and killed 4 toms out of a large flock. They'd have turkey for both Thanksgiving and Christmas this year and in years to come they'd have a large flock of turkeys to provide an important new element in their diet.

Save for the fact that Gary and Clarence still rode the fence lines to keep out an eye for rustlers', life on the ranch was completely routine and downright dull. Rustlers were few and far between, maybe the word got out, and aside from stopping once in a while to mend a broken wire or replace a broken fence post, the 2 men were just riding in circles, killing time. Sharon had gotten Linda and Lucy interested in the quilting and most of the women at the village got together every afternoon to spend an hour or two working on their latest project.

In the evening, they played a VHS or DVD movie in the community building, but they'd seen most of the movies at least twice by this time. Gary had resumed reading all of the novels he'd missed reading earlier in life because they hadn't struck his fancy. He sat at his computer desk in the family/sewing room and frequently read late into the night. He was discovering that a lot of the books he'd missed reading earlier still didn't strike his fancy. On Saturdays, Gary and Clarence spent the days casting .45 caliber bullets. Gary had several large canisters of the Accurate 4100 powder and thousands of primers. Primers came 1,000 to the box and Remington had 8 sizes while Winchester had 7, Federal had 15 and CCI had 19.

Warning: The high velocity loads for the .45 Colt using 22 grains of Accurate 4100 powder were taken from their 2003 reloading guide. The loads are for Ruger, Thompson Contender, Freedom Arms and .45 caliber rifles only. They'd blow a SAA to hell and gone. For the revolver cartridges, they used 11 grains of No. 5 powder. 437.5 grains = 1 ounce avoirdupois. An 8# canister holds enough powder (56,000 grains) to load 2,545 rifle cartridges or 5,090 revolver cartridges. The .45 Colt was the magnum of its day. Trying to load a .45 Colt to equal a .44 Remington Magnum is considered to be stupid. Get a .44 Remington Magnum weapon instead.

A Time Since Passed – Part II – Chapter Twenty Seven – One Last Trip

Monday, July 4, 2011, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Clarence and Gary had one hell of a spring before it was over. They kept hunting turkeys and chasing down hens. They didn't kill all of the hens because they needed to leave breeding stock but they had hunted well into June stealing the chicks from the nests. The average clutch of eggs ranged from 8 - 12. Before they had finished, they'd chased down 9 hens and their flock of turkeys was right around 90. They had the one thing that the younger people didn't, patience. Gary was keeping a journal of their adventures in hopes that someday they get the Internet back up and he could publish another yarn. The sad truth was that with Ron gone to the great beyond, Gary and Clarence were just sitting there, waiting for their turn to join him.

Clarence noticed that Gary had stopped carrying 2 revolvers. These days he was content to just wear that 4½" Colt in a crossdraw holster. He'd also gotten rid of the shotgun and only carried his Winchester 94 rifle on his horse. The bandoleer with the two rows of .45 Colt ammunition was draped on his saddle horn or left at home when Gary's memory failed him. That seemed to happen a lot lately.

"Gary, come here and join the party," Clarence said. "We have hot dogs, hamburgers and even watermelon today."

"Maybe just one hot dog, partner, I'm not very hungry," Gary replied.

"Not feeling good?" Clarence asked.

"Nah, I feel fine, I'm just not very hungry," Gary replied.

"Big breakfast, huh?" Clarence continued.

"Maybe, I don't know," Gary chuckled, "I forget."

"You seem distant today, what's going on?" Clarence asked.

"I was thinking of all that's happened and all that could have been," Gary replied.

"Here's to absent friends," Clarence said raising his glass.

"I'll drink to that, do we have any lemonade?" Gary asked.

"Iced tea or cold tea with ice?" Clarence asked.

"Either one will be fine," Gary said.

"Are you losing weight?" Clarence asked when he returned with the tea.

"I think it's just my pants stretching out," Gary replied.

"Excuse me a minute, Gary," Clarence said, "I just spotted Derek and I need to say Hi."

"Derek, what's going on with your Dad?" Clarence asked.

"Clarence, I think it's just depression, but I already have him on a maximum dose of Zoloft so there's not much more that I can do," Derek replied.

"How much weight has he lost?" Clarence asked.

"About 10 pounds, he down to 135," Derek answered.

"What can I do to get him out of his funk?" Clarence asked.

"I think he'd like to get back to California," Derek said. "Could the two of you handle a couple of pack animals and make the journey?"

"Man, I don't know," Clarence said. "That's a long trip on horseback. I reckon it's nearly 1,000 miles. That would take a month or more."

"Maybe you could take a buggy and trail the pack animals behind," Derek suggested.

"If we had 4 of the Tennessee Walking horses, we could take them," Clarence said. "But since we only have 3, I think we should use the Morgan's. They have very good endurance. We could trail for 3 hours, take a break and then trail for 3 more and stop for lunch. We could do the same thing in the afternoon and probably get in 9-10 hours a day riding, maybe more. I guess we could maybe figure on 35-40 miles a day. Yeah, sure, why not. I'll bring it up with your Dad."

"How's Derek?" Gary asked.

"He's fine, Gary," Clarence replied. "I was just asking him if you were up to a little ride."

"Where we going?" Gary brightened slightly.

"You know, it been a while since we were in California, Gary," Clarence continued. "I'd sure like to see that country one more time. "Would you be up to keeping me company on a month long ride?"

"I'll start packing," Gary laughed.

"We'll let the others fix up a string of pack horses for us and we'll leave the day after tomorrow," Clarence said.

When it was all said and done, each of the men was leading 3 packhorses. The pack animals only had a load of about 80 pounds so they wouldn't tire out. All of the horses were broke to both pack and saddle and the plan was to switch horses every time they stopped. As I said, Gary went about 135 and Clarence maybe 165. By trailing 3 pack animals, they could divide the load between the animals allowing them to ride longer during the day. They ran the horse by the smith and made sure their hoofs could handle the trip. The plan was to follow the roads over to highway 491 and cut south to I-40. They'd ride by the side of the roads because long distances on hard surfaced roads could be hard on the horses. They started off easy and made it to Las Animas on the first day. From Las Animas to Cedar Hill, NM took them 8 more days. They stopped there for a day to let the horses rest up. The first leg of the journey had taken 9 days and covered about 375 miles. They stayed at Robert's old house. Which of course got them to visiting about Ron.

"It's a shame Ron wasn't around to make this ride," Gary started off.

"I think maybe he's along, at least in spirit," Clarence replied.

"I gotta tell ya, my butt is tired," Gary admitted. "What's our next destination?"

"I was thinking we'd ride on down to Gallup and depending upon what time we got there may head west into Arizona," Clarence replied.

"How long do you figure that will take?" Gary asked.

"Three days, Gary," Clarence replied. "From there, I figured we could ride about halfway to Needles in 5 days and then lay over for another day to rest the horses."

"How far is it from say the Arizona line to Needles?" Gary asked.

"Around 375 miles, give or take," Clarence replied.

"When would that put us in California?" Gary asked.

"Figure 3 days to the Arizona border and 11 more to the California line," Clarence replied.

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Friday, July 15, 2011, Cedar Hill, NM...

It took the 2 old men 3 days to get to Gallup and they got in a little early so they kept riding and stopped in Lupton, AZ for their second layover. They laid over in Lupton on Monday, July 18th and headed for Needles the following day. The weather was pretty hot and they took it easy on the horses so they didn't actually get to Needles until July 31st. Up to this point the trip had been long, but uneventful. They'd taken twice as many

stops as they'd planned, but considering the heat, the horses needed the extra rest. Once in Needles, they laid over the 1st and 2nd of August and headed on to Palmdale. Clarence's best guess was that they were about 230 miles from Palmdale, and he suggested that they ride for 3 days, rest the horses a day and continue on. They arrived in Palmdale, CA on Tuesday, August 9th. The journey had taken 35 days including the rest stops.

"I sure hope we can find a buggy," Gary told Clarence. "It will take my butt and back a month to heal up from that ride."

"I sort of figured on that, Gary," Clarence laughed. "I seem to recall a horse wagon down at the place on highway 14 at the Crown Valley Road exit. I had them put in the harnesses for a 4-horse and a 6-horse rig to haul us back, just in case. We can saddle the horses and lead them behind the wagon. It's going to take us the better part of 45 days to get back to Colorado, you know, it's up hill most of the way."

"We didn't look around Sierra Gun Store or Sandy's store either, you know, what with the buildings being knocked down," Gary pointed out. "There a slim chance that one or both of them had some ammo and some of their weapons survive. I don't suppose the guns would be any good as long as it's been but it would be good to have some new .45 ammo just to have the brass to reload."

"We can check it out tomorrow, where do you want to stay tonight?" Clarence asked.

"My shelter was locked up tight and unless someone took a cutting torch to the entrance, it should still be sound," Gary replied.

"Fine, we'll stay at your place tonight and head to Acton tomorrow," Clarence said.

"I wonder if there's anyone at the housing tract I still know," Gary reflected.

"We could always stay at my place," Clarence suggested.

"If we have any trouble at Moon Shadows, we probably will," Gary agreed.

"Hell, there isn't a house standing; what makes you think anyone would be there?" Clarence asked.

"I suppose because Chris and Patti and Dick and Darlene were still there the last time we came back to California," Gary replied.

"That's only because you left your shelter open for them, Gar-Bear," Clarence suggested. "Do suppose there's anything left in that Wal-Mart store?"

"We'll check it out before we leave for Colorado," Gary suggested. "Do you want to take the first watch or the second tonight?"

"I'll take the second and that way you can sleep though until morning," Clarence answered. "How are you holding up without the nebulizer treatments and no oxygen?"

"Been worse and been better," Gary chuckled. "I wear a Vicks saturated cloth around my neck and it keeps me open."

"I wondered was that smell was," Clarence smiled.

"We're here, partner, let's see if the shelter is still secure," Gary nodded towards where his house used to stand.

The flower box camouflaging the blast door was missing and someone had hammered on the blast door a lot trying to break it open. It was, however, very secure. They tied up the horses and removed the pack and saddles. Next, Gary dug down beside the vertical shaft about a foot and pulled out a 1" thick rod. He repeated the action on the other side of the shaft and easily lifted the blast door open.

"The springs are still good," Gary observed.

"I'll get my lariat and lower the supplies down to you," Clarence announced. "What do you want me to keep out for supper?"

"I'll take an MRE if we still have some, Clarence, I don't feel like cooking," Gary answered. "Dang I'm tired."

"Are you going to be able to stay awake?" Clarence asked.

"I'll just hold off on the Xanax, and I'll be ok," Gary replied.

"What flavor of MRE?" Clarence asked.

"They all taste the same so just give me whatever is on the top of the pile."

Gary woke Clarence about 5 to midnight and they traded places. Gary handed Clarence his Super Magnum 870 and sacked out on a bare bunk in the shelter. Five minutes later Clarence could hear him snoring from outside of the shelter. Clarence put on a pot of coffee and decided to let his old pal sleep until morning. Clarence awoke with a start around half past 7. They obviously had not had any visitors that night; the 8 horses were still hobbled and staked out eating the grass on Gary's backyard. He brewed up some more coffee and got Gary up. Gary's breakfast consisted of an MRE entrée and half a pot of coffee.

"You eat like a bird," Clarence told Gary.

“Haven’t had a lot of appetite lately, partner, I’m fine,” Gary responded. “Let’s get the stuff back topside and head for Acton.”

When they got to Acton that old wagon was still sitting there. They got a can of grease from the Union 76 station down the road, greased the axles and transferred all of the cargo to the back of the wagon. The two freshest horses were saddled up and tied behind the wagon and they headed up 14 to the Rancho Vista exit and headed east to the Sierra Gun shop. Clarence had picked up a block of concrete to anchor the horses when they got to the shop. An hour’s worth of digging produced maybe 1,000 rounds of .45 Colt and an assortment of other calibers including 5.56 and 7.62. They also got some expandable 26” steel batons and a few revolvers still in the box. All of the rifles were badly rusted and nothing more than junk. It was about 2 miles over to Sandy’s ruins and after moving more debris they came up with all sorts of usable things. Not the least of which was to about 2,500 rounds of .45 Colt ammunition, powder and primers.

Just getting the .45 Colt ammo had made the trip worthwhile. They hung around the area for 2 more days and then hitched up the horses and headed back to Colorado. They were only managing about 30 miles a day even though they had a 4-horse team pulling the wagon. They cut through Edwards AFB and picked up Highway 58 and headed east. Clarence pointed out that they would have to rig for a 6-horse team once they got to the state line. When they arrived in Barstow they first found a longer 4x4 beam and Clarence spent a day or so with a drawknife making it into a tongue. From this point on, they used a 6-horse team. They had departed one week later on August 16th and arrived back at Adobe Creek Village on Monday, October 3rd. With the weather finally chilling, Gary had picked up another cold. As soon as they got home, Derek had him on 4 liters of oxygen and 6 nebulizer treatments a day. He also administered an antibiotic just in case, but it wasn’t until November 23rd that Gary was up and around.

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Thursday, November 24, 2011, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

The smell of the baking turkey seemed to fill Gary with energy the following morning and he got up expecting monkey bread. Sharon had 2 recipes for the breakfast delight, the one he loved and the one he ate to be polite. The one he loved took canned biscuits cut in half and they hadn’t had any canned biscuits in a coon’s age. The other recipe was made using bread dough and it was usually a little drier. This morning it was recipe number one substituting the bread dough for the biscuits. Hot dang he hoped he left room for the turkey cooking in the oven.

Clarence had proved very adept managing a team of 6 horses. He had the reins interlaced between his fingers and the horses just clomped along the highways. As they began to climb out of California to the continental divide, the roads slowly got worse, showing the many years of neglect. Some days they’d made pretty good time and on others, they had to stop and rest the horses before tackling the next great hill. Gary had picked up the sniffles somewhere in New Mexico and he began to wonder if he’d make

it home. He obviously had, but it was followed by 6 weeks of fighting that darned cold. Every time he caught a cold it took a little longer to recover. No matter, he felt great today. Sharon had dinner planned around 3pm and Derek was over early to check on him and to have a little visit.

"I don't know what made me remember, kid, but where the hell are my knives?" Gary asked.

"You mean your Rambo II and that little Explorer boot knife?" Derek asked. "Danged if I know, Dad, they'd stripped them off me when I got blown up by that IED."

"You promised me pictures if you had to use the knife to protect yourself and you promised to return the knife as I remember," Gary said. "It doesn't really matter, I just gave you the knife and made you promise to return it when you got home so you had to get back. Pretty to look at, but those Cold Steel Laredo Bowies are about 100 times better. While I have these things on my mind, I want to tell what to do with my things when I'm finally gone."

"I don't know that I'm comfortable talking about things like that," Derek replied.

"Just shut up and listen, kid," Gary said, "Here's what I want. Josh is only 10 years old but he's going to grow into one hell of a fine young man. I want him to have my fast draw rigs and that Winchester rifle. Give him the whole thing including that Laredo Bowie when he turns 16. You can divide up the remainder of the things as you see fit, but I especially want Josh to have what I said."

"It almost sounds like you're planning on dying," Derek said. "I don't want to hear that crap, I've kept you going this long and I've got a few tricks up my sleeve."

"So, I'll live to be 80, but you remember what I told you," Gary insisted.

"Yes sir," Derek replied cutting off the maudlin topic.

Gar-Bear seemed to be lost in his memories on this particular Thanksgiving. He thought about Kevin, who he hadn't particularly liked, and his son, Damon. Then he began to dwell on good old Ronald. Ron had taught him everything he ever needed to know to get through life and he owed his partner a great debt of gratitude. Ron sure did some mighty strange things, like buying that .375 H&H Magnum rifle and then bitching every time he pulled the trigger and sent a \$3 bullet down the range. What did it matter that he bought most of his 5.56 ammo at Wal-Mart? Those bullets killed a bad guys just as dead as the Lake City surplus ammo at the ranges that they'd fought their battles. And, they used up the civilian ammo first because it didn't have the moisture seals inherent in the military ammo. Still, they had used up a lot of ammo because of poor fire discipline.

A Time Since Passed – Part II – Chapter Twenty Eight – And Then There Was One

Apparently, Gary didn't trust Derek's judgment because when Christmas came he passed out most of his personal possessions as Christmas presents. All except his fast draw rigs, the Winchester rifle and the Laredo Bowie knife that he told Derek to give to Josh. Derek didn't know quite what to make of the situation so he kept his peace. He had noticed that Gary had cut down on his smoking and wondered if his Dad was having more breathing problems. He suggested that Gary come by the clinic for a checkup after the first of the year.

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Monday, January 2, 2012, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

"You said to be here so here I am," Gary announced.

"How have you been getting along?" Derek asked.

"Not bad, I have my smoking down to about 6 cigarettes a day," Gary replied.

"Get your shirt off and let me listen to your lungs," Derek suggested.

"You can listen to my heart too, it's still pumping," Gary laughed.

"Take a deep breath," Derek instructed.

"And again," he repeated.

"Darn, your wheeze is gone," Derek announced. "They were right all along, the smoking was causing your problems."

"I never once claimed it didn't, kid," Gary laughed, "I just refused to quit."

"Are you going to quit completely?" Derek asked.

"You bet, I'm switching to cigars," Gary replied. "And as soon as the weather warms up, Clarence and I are going to be riding fence again."

"You are absolutely certifiable," Derek snorted.

"I'll be 69 on my next birthday, kid, do you want me to live forever?" Gary asked.

"I wouldn't mind," Derek replied.

"Tough, I'm getting very tired," Gary commented. "Now the shoe is on the other foot and you can worry about me instead of me worrying about you."

“You keep smoking and you’re going to die,” Derek said.

“I quit smoking and I’ll die anyway, so I might just as well enjoy going out,” Gary smirked.

“Whatever,” Derek said dismissing his father.

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Friday, March 23, 2012, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Josh, it should be noted, was born on 12-29-03. Thus the previous Thanksgiving Gar-Bear had been off by 2 years. He’d turned 8 years old 4 days after Christmas. Maybe it was the fact that he took after his Dad a little and had shot up that had confused Gary. There was no mistaking the fact the Gary turned 69 on this March 23rd. Gary never had taken up smoking cigars, but his cigarette smoking was back up to a pack a day. He had to go to the basement to smoke, of course, Sharon wouldn’t allow him to smoke in HER house.

They had devil’s food cake and homemade ice cream. Wasn’t hard to make ice cream in the winter; there was a ton of snow outside and 3 icehouses full of ice. And it hadn’t really started to warm up much even though they were 2 days into spring. It was called the vernal equinox and was always March 20th or 21st. This past Elder’s Council meeting the village had finally agreed on a set of radio color codes to define most of the emergencies they might encounter. They had ended up adopting the uniform emergency codes used in Florida hospitals at one time:

RED - Fire
BLUE - Cardiac/Respiratory Arrest
PINK - Infant/Child Abduction
BLACK - Bomb
ORANGE - Hazmat/Bioterrorism
GREY - Violence/Security Alert
WHITE - Hostage
YELLOW - Lockdown
GREEN - Mass Casualty/Disaster
BROWN - Severe Weather

They still had a few operating radios but one of these days they wouldn’t be able to charge the batteries any more. According to the plan adopted, in an emergency, you were supposed to make a radio broadcast with a color code followed by the location, e.g., Code Grey, NE Cow Pasture would advise of rustler up where Gary and Clarence had taken out the rustler or whatever he was. Some of the codes actually made sense but others were very unlikely to ever be used, like Code Pink.

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Monday, May 7, 2012, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Cooped up for most of the winter, Clarence and Gary were anxious to get their horses saddled up and start riding the fence line. Over the weekend, one of the Vaqueros had ridden their horses getting rid of the spunkiness that horses sometimes develop when they haven't been ridden in a while. Years of sitting a saddle paid off for the two old men because the horses were still a little frisky. Gary's gelding, a Morgan named Charger, took longer to settle down than Clarence's mare, oddly named Salina. But an hour in the saddle saw the horses settled down and they were riding the horse pasture. This was the pasture with the wooden fence mentioned earlier in the story.

They were carrying hammers and nails in their saddlebags, stopping occasionally to repair a damaged board. One place they came to was going to need lumber to make the repair and at the end of their first circuit, they loaded lumber on a wagon, hitched up a team and tied their saddle horses to the back of the wagon. It was necessary to get the fence repaired today so the horses could be let loose to roam the entire pasture. They completed the second circuit repairing boards and when they got to the barn knocked off for a late lunch. The gates to the pasture had been opened after that 2nd circuit so the horses were slowly spread out over the huge pasture.

After lunch they cinched their saddles and headed back to the pasture for one last circuit. Neither man moved quite as fast as they had in the past, Gary was 69 and Clarence 70. Over lunch, Gary had slipped the cross draw holster off his gun belt because he claimed it chaffed a little. It was pretty peaceful these days and they hadn't had a rustler for quite a while. They followed the west fence line and then the north fence line a mile east to the east fence line. About half way down the east fence line they came to the place where they put in new boards on their previous circuit.

"Son of a Bitch," Gary exclaimed. "Those new boards are down. Use the radio and get us some backup, partner, I don't like the looks of this."

"This is Clarence, Code Grey at the middle of the east horse pasture fence line," Clarence radioed.

"10-4, do you require assistance?" the village answered.

"Affirmative, we might have rustlers," Clarence replied.

"10-4 dispatching riders."

Gary thumbed off the hammer thong off his revolver and checked the cartridges. He slipped the long barreled Colt back into his holster and pulled his Winchester, jacking a round into the chamber and adding a rifle cartridge to get the rifle to full load. Clarence did the same with his revolver and shotgun. They tied their horses to the fence and pro-

ceeded carefully to the open fence section. From the looks of the boards, someone had tied a rope to them and pulled them off one-by-one.

“This is Clarence, where is that backup, we definitely have rustlers,” Clarence radioed.

“10-4, they’re on their way, ETA 10 minutes,” the village replied.

“Cra-ack” came the rifle report and Gary pitched face forward into the mud.

“This is Clarence,” Clarence radioed, “Man down.”

“10-4, say condition,” the village radioed.

Gary wasn’t moving and Clarence wasn’t about to expose his position by moving around. He decided quickly to stir the pot and radioed, “Code Blue, I say again Code Blue.”

Meanwhile Derek was hustling to get to the barn and get a wagon hitched to return the down man, who he assumed was his Dad. They had a horse saddled for him and he took off on a gallop to the scene of the shooting with a rider following in the wagon. When he got to the scene the other riders had fanned out and were guarding the hole in the fence. Clarence was ministering to Gary. Gary wasn’t dead, the bullet had apparently missed any vital organs, but he was confused and going into shock. The wound was through-and-through and was bleeding from both the entrance and exit wounds. There was a small hole in the back and a fist-sized hole just below the rib cage in the front.

Derek established a pair of IV’s and put dressings on both of the wounds. He gave his Dad an ampoule of Morphine and waited for the wagon to show up. He gave Clarence a small injection of a tranquilizer and when the wagon arrived they loaded Gary and Clarence on the wagon. They had barely cleared the scene when a band of 6 men came herding a group of about 30 horses to that gap in the fence. They never made it through, they were outnumbered 2 to 1 and they all died on the spot.

That jostling wagon was giving Gary quite a beating as they transported him back to the clinic. There was nothing Derek could do to ease Gary’s suffering until they got him to the clinic. The 20 some minute ride seemed like a year but finally they had Gary to the clinic. Derek debrided the exit wound, sutured a couple of bleeders, inserted a drainage tube and sewed his Dad up. They rolled Gary over and did the same to the entrance wound and the put Gary in bed with IV’s dripping and an extra IV of antibiotics.

The wounds eventually began to abscess and Derek cultured the wounds confirming a staph infection. He began administering the proper antibiotics to counter the staph infection but this one appeared to be a drug-resistant strain of staph. No amount of antibiotics could curtail the infection and Gary died 5 days later on Saturday, May 12, 2012.

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Monday, May 14, 2012, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

The tombstone read, "Gary D. Olsen, 3-23-43 – 5-12-12, Shot in the back by a thieving Rustler."

They buried Gary alongside Ron, 2 fathers and 2 sons who had fallen victim to the times. Clarence delivered the Eulogy, recounting how Gary had beaten the Devil in his battle with alcohol. 13 years and counting was all that Clarence said on the subject except that Gary, like Ron, was beyond slipping. They were down to one amigo.

The village and the farm were prosperous, unlike some areas in the country. They had the rifle that one of the rustlers had used to shoot Gar-Bear. Winchester model 70 hunting rifle loaded with Silver Tip bullets. No doubt, had he lived, Gary would have been an invalid, and the hunting slug had done a lot of hidden damage. Fortunately he was spared the years of suffering.

Clarence never rode the fence line again. He was content to entertain his grandchildren and great grandchildren. Derek remembered his promise to his father and took the Winchester, 2 Colt's, the Laredo Bowie knife and that fancy gun belt and put them up for Josh. It would still be 6 years before Josh was allowed to carry a gun, but Derek would spend a lot of time on the range with Josh using up the last of the Cowboy loads and getting Josh to the point where he was a dead shot with both of the revolvers and the Winchester rifle.

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This saga of The Three Amigos was over. Clarence lived out his years and died 10 years later at the ripe old age of 80. There would be a new group also called The Three Amigos in the years to come, but it wasn't time for that just yet. During the fall of 2013, the influenza managed to infiltrate the village and a dozen or more people died, including Derek's wife Mary. Mary had been a powerful influence in Derek's life and he took her death especially hard. Josh was just short of 11 when Mary died and his sister Elizabeth had already been thinking about getting married at the ripe old age of 13.

When Josh turned 16 on December 29, 2019, he received his grandfather's weapons. All the practice over the past 6 years had paid off and he was both deadly and fast. The following summer, Josh and some friends made a trip to Rapid City, South Dakota. They located the Black Hills ammo factory and brought 3 wagonloads of ammo and components back to the village. Included in the loads were 7.62 and 5.56 ammo and a whole lot of that Cowboy ammo. Some of Ron's guns had fallen into disuse because the cartridge cases couldn't be reloaded any more. That problem was solved and with any kind of luck, they would have enough ammo to see to their future needs.

A Present Time – Part III – Chapter Twenty Nine – ‘Sons’ of The Three Amigos

Thursday, March 19, 2034, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

They were celebrating Derek's 60th birthday today. Derek was no longer referred to as a Paramedic; they just called him the Medicine Man. One by one the older generation had died off. Ron had gone first in 2010, clogged arteries that Derek was helpless to do anything about. Gary had gone a couple of years later the victim of a staph infection caused by a rustler's bullet. Clarence had lasted until the ripe old age of 80 and had died in 2022. There were still 3 amigos, but the makeup was a lot different, two men and a woman to be precise. They were James Rawlings, Derek Olsen and Brenda Green. Derek's second wife, Mary had died in 2013, victim of one of those recurring epidemics. Brenda had never remarried and rumor had it that Derek and she kept company, but nobody knew for sure. They occupied separate cabins and were never caught sneaking around.

As the community had slowly grown, mostly from people moving in, they'd expanded the farming ground until they were farming 640 acres. Horses did it all now and they had a large herd of Belgians and another of Morgan's. For some reason no one could remember, they lost the 3 Tennessee Walking Horses. There were a lot of manual trades, like a village blacksmith who'd taken over from his father, the farrier. Derek Jr. was studying to become the next medicine man. Joshua was full of pee and vinegar and was what his grandfather had always wanted to be. Josh looked like he would end up being the future head of the clan. He wore a six-gun strapped low and was as fast or faster than anyone in the village. But, he'd been brought up right and was slow to rile. Derek claimed that Josh had Gary's temper.

Josh had two gun rigs he chose between. The first was the crossdraw rig with the 4 $\frac{5}{8}$ " Ruger in the crossdraw holster and the 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " Ruger in the right holster. The second rig was the sole black holster with the 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " Vaquero. The box containing the rig had a modern .45 Colt derringer with a note instructing to carry the derringer under the buckle of the gun belt.

In summary, gangs of one sort or another had attacked them many times. There'd been more of the convict gangs and then a scavenger gang or two, but they'd managed to survive. Derek's brother, Damon, had been killed in one of those attacks, as had Ron's son Kevin. Derek had no idea where his father had come up with the term Mutant Zombie Bikers, but even a gang of bikers had attacked. There was some cruelty in this new world of 2034. They'd eventually exhausted almost all of the ammunition for their 5.56 and 7.62 rifles and it wasn't until Josh had ventured to Rapid City in the former South Dakota that they had a new supply.

Josh and 2 friends had brought back all of the ammo they could find at the Black Hills Ammunition plant and they reserved most for those automatic rifles in case of trouble. The cache of cowboy ammunition had been most welcome. These days, most of the people that carried guns had returned to the lever action rifle and the six-gun. They no

longer had batteries for their Survey meters but they had those radiation detectors they'd assembled from the kits that their parents had bought. It was now safe to venture to Colorado Springs and Denver, briefly, but they couldn't find much to salvage and had banned further trips because of lingering radiation in some areas. Joshua was about 31 years old and still single.

The biggest problem they still had was rustlers. Josh was well armed to deal with the rustlers; he carried a short-barreled Mossberg shotgun on one side in a scabbard and a Winchester .45 Colt on the other side in a scabbard. His big Morgan horse could handle the extra weight of the guns because Josh was about 5'10, but only weighed 150. Blue eyes and blonde hair, too. His grandfather had picked up an extra holster on a trip down to Texas long before he died and Josh wore 2 revolvers, both for a right-handed draw. He had a blued Ruger in a 4 $\frac{5}{8}$ " barrel in the crossdraw holster and that big 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " blued Ruger by his side. Josh wore 2 bandoleers, one filled with shotgun shells and the other with 2 rows of .45 caliber cartridges. The other gun rig was carried in a saddle bag. He also wore a big sombrero to shade his back and some of the folks kidded him that he looked like Pancho Villa, whoever Pancho Villa was.

Josh mostly rode herd at night, circling the horses or cattle and keeping an eye out for rustlers. Some of the other riders were vaqueros, being of Hispanic heritage and some were Native Americans. In 2034, people didn't pay much attention to race, just to your character. And, there were good and bad in all of the races. People paid more attention to whether or not your word was your bond these days. When you looked a man in the eye and took his hand, you were committed or suddenly found yourself an outcast. This was the usual punishment these days because it was about the same thing as a death sentence.

It could have easily been mistaken for 1884 instead of 2034 if you were a history buff making a comparison. A Council of Elders all about Josh's father's age ruled the village. These days the life expectancy was down according to Derek. One time a man was expected to live to 74-75 and a woman to 80-81, an average of a shade over 77 years. You could shade about 8 years off that life expectancy these days. There weren't very many people in their seventies, let alone their eighties. A man reached his majority at 16 and a woman when she could bear children. Any woman who reached the age of 21 and was single was considered to be a spinster, just as a man of the same age was a bachelor.

In addition to farming the 640 acres, they used another section of ground for their cattle and a third for the horses. Horse thieves were every bit as common as cattle thieves and they had to ride herd on them as well. Josh was grateful his grandpa had gone to Texas and gotten that extra crossdraw holster. It made clearing leather from the back of a horse so much easier. And on occasion, clearing leather was what was called for. They didn't hang rustlers, they didn't live that long. Rustlers were as much fair game as say a deer or an elk. When you killed them, you had to bury them, but you got their horse, saddle and gear. Josh had a fair string of horses. That cowboy ammo he brought back was fine for his revolver, but when he reloaded the ammo he added a few extra

grains of power to the casings to shoot in his rifles. The top row in the bandoleer was rifle shells and the bottom row was cartridges for his revolvers. He didn't realize that the original Vaqueros could handle the rifle loads.

Josh was thinking he'd like to become the village marshal. The man they had had reached age 55 and was being forced to retire. Josh was about the right age and if he got the job, he was looking at a 23-year career. They didn't have much trouble in the village and about the only time the marshal ever left was to chase down some rustlers. Brenda had opened a saloon after Clarence had died and she'd called it Miss Kitty's for some reason only the older folks understood. She sold homebrewed beer and home-made whiskey that was rumored to put hair on your chest. Being a good Baptist, Josh didn't drink very often and then it was a rare beer at the only saloon in the village.

Drunks weren't much tolerated and if a person developed a proclivity for booze, he or she either sobered up or got exiled. That had been a hard and fast rule since The Three Amigos had founded the first ruling council. The rumor was that the 3 old men had been recovered drunks, but Josh had never seen them take a single drink during the time they were living. The strange thing was each of them seemed to have 2 birthdays and they celebrated the one every year and tried to ignore the second. The only present they ever got at their birthday party was a cake with a lot of candles. Strange.

Election Day was the 4th of July and it was also the celebration of the country's independence. The big holiday was Easter but years ago it had been changed to the 3rd Sunday in the month of March because apparently the date varied and no one knew how to calculate the real date. The other holidays were Thanksgiving, Christmas and January 8, Deliverance Day as it was called. They were now in their 31st year of Deliverance, having celebrated their 30th anniversary on January 7, 2007. Apparently before then, this had been a real country, but Josh had only been 4 years old when the attacks came and he couldn't remember. His only memory of that day was his father rushing home and getting him and his mother and brother and sister and going to grandpa's basement.

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Saloons were no longer smoke filled rooms because they'd run out of smoking materials years before. There were still some small supplies for people like his father but even Derek didn't smoke very often; usually only when he was terribly upset about something. Josh could see that his Dad was upset about something because he had a bowl filled with stubbed out butts.

"What's wrong Dad?" Josh asked.

"I don't like the idea of you running for village marshal," Derek replied.

“When Mom was alive she talked about you’re running off to war every chance you got,” Josh replied. “She said you’d been to Korea and Kosovo and even had volunteered to go to Iraq. She said you got hurt real bad in Iraq. What was that all about, Dad?”

“Back in those days the United States of America was fighting a war on terrorism, Josh,” Derek explained. “I guess that the war started after some people flew jet airplanes into 2 buildings in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Anyway, I got called up to go to Kosovo on a peacekeeping mission. Then in 2004, my National Guard unit needed 155 volunteers to go to Iraq for guard duty. I volunteered because I thought it was my duty and because the Iowa National Guard unit was changing from tanks to Mechanized Infantry. My truck was dang near blown to Hell by an Improvised Explosive Device and only my buddy Bill and I survived.”

“The way I see it, it’s my duty to run for the village marshal’s office,” Josh said.

“That’s what I told my father when he objected to me going to Iraq,” Derek said. “I think we were both right in a way. He understood why I volunteered, but he didn’t like it much. So, you go ahead and run for marshal but you don’t mind if I won’t vote for you, ok?”

“It’s a pretty tame job, Dad,” Josh pointed out.

“Unless you have to go after rustlers it is,” Derek replied.

“I’m pretty handy with a gun,” Josh again pointed out.

“That won’t keep you from getting ambushed like I was in Iraq, Josh,” Derek said. “Or like your grandfather was back in 2012. But you go right ahead and be a hero, if you must. Just keep your powder dry.”

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Sunday, July 5, 2034, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

Josh Olsen had handily won the election, no doubt in large part to his father’s unexpected support. Apparently Derek had thought it over and decided to support his son in his endeavor. This volunteering thing just ran in the family. Mary would have been so proud of Josh. Derek was just a few months more than 1 year older than Brenda, but Brenda preferred to be called Miss Kitty these days. There were only 4 people in all of the village that really knew if Derek and Brenda were keeping company, Brenda, Derek, James and Josh. Josh had decided that he had nothing to say on the subject one way or the other and when the subject got brought up, an ‘I don’t know’ seemed to satisfy most people.

There was a brief swearing in ceremony and Josh donned the badge of authority. It was a replica Marshal Badge his grandpa had picked up at a place in Texas or Arizona when he’d gotten holsters and bandoleers. Maintaining law and order was easy most of the

time. Usually just a gentle reminder and an offender quickly corrected his or her behavior. This wasn't always the case with drunks, however, and they got a week in the cooler to reflect on their transgression. A second offense got them before the council of elders and everyone knew what a third offense meant. It was just too terrible to contemplate for most.

In another community, the values might be different and they might have different offenses that led to exile. That was however, the universal punishment and new people were rarely admitted because they were most probably exiles from another town or village. Those that readily owned up to being exiles were sometimes admitted depending upon the offense. Some villages exiled you for not attending church and some for being a drunk like Adobe Creek Village. The main differences in the punishments were in the nature of the exiles. If it was a passive offense, like being a drunk, you got to take your personal possessions. Violent offenders took nothing with them. The family could choose to stay but they would be under a watchful eye for a period of time. Let them try to sneak something to the exiled violent offender, however and when they got caught, they joined him or her.

Adobe Creek Village was a Christian Village and they preferred to keep it that way. They didn't have any rules about church attendance and they pretty much lived by the 10 Commandments. Except for the rule about drunks, that is. On the other hand the village was somewhat forgiving when it came to adultery. Two single people could 'get together' and no one said a word. Maybe that was just plain common sense. Adultery where one of the persons was married was dealt with strictly with the offending couple earning the passive form of exile. And, exile was just that, exile. If you ever showed up again, you were shot on the spot, no questions asked. They hadn't had to do that since Clarence died.

If the offending person in the case of adultery were a woman, her husband was free to remarry. If the offending person were a man, she was free to remarry but somehow the wife usually ended up working at 'Miss Kitty's'. Some things hadn't changed much in 150 years. Except perhaps that a person who sold their body wasn't looked down upon or made to feel less than. That was limited to women, of course, because early on anyone who showed a proclivity for a same sex relationship had been exiled with naught but the clothes on his or her back. Working at 'Miss Kitty's' served a community need and more often than not the woman eventually found herself a good man. Rumor had it that there were whole communities that the inhabitants were all 'that way'. Good, because if boys like boys and girls liked girls, they'd die out in a generation. The Bible admonished 'judge not lest ye be judged' but was that any way to run a community and maintain law and order?

That's what Joshua found himself up against when he became the marshal. The village was inside of the fort. The wall dividing the residential section and the livestock section had come down many years before and it was now entirely residential. The barns were out where the horses and cattle roamed. They had vast herds of cattle, horses and hogs plus the largest poultry operation in this part of the country, as far as they knew. People

came from all around just to buy chickens and eggs. And, they had the only flock of turkeys in this part of the country.

A Present Time – Part III – Chapter Thirty – New Trading Partners

Derek Olsen was born in 1974. Born and raised in Iowa, he'd seen some of the world, especially places like Korea, Kosovo and Iraq. He'd spent time at Ft. Stewart before going to Kosovo and at Ft. Hood before going to Iraq. Mary and he had planned on moving to Arkansas after he'd gotten back from Iraq, but their plans changed when he got blown up and then the world had gone to Hell in a handcart. Mary had been unhappy about moving to California and then Colorado, but she hung in there like the good wife she was. Then in the fall of 2013 that darned bug slipped in and took out a fair number of people.

Brenda Green aka Miss Kitty had been married once to a fella back in Ft. Smith. He was a fairly nice guy but Brenda was wild and she ended up getting divorced. She admittedly tramped around a little and the husband got sole custody of their son. She ended up back in Palmdale living with her folks and working on the set of JAG with her brother John. Then JAG ended and they worked security on another movie set. She never re-married but frequently dated. Fact was she looked a little bit like Amanda Blake, but was about 4" taller at 5'9. Nice looking woman with a really great smile and an explosive temper.

James Rawlings was married to a pretty gal named Tamara and they had one child, Clarence. James was about Derek's size at 6'2" but he lifted weights and was a fine physical specimen. James knew computers inside out and had managed to keep everyone's old hunk of junk running despite every challenge. That wouldn't last too much longer because he was running out of replacement parts. He also kept the radios running. The radios were Motorola CM-300 base stations/vehicle mobiles and CP 200 handheld VHF (5w) and UHF (4w) radios. The 1800 mAh Li-ion Batteries provided 14 hours and didn't have a problem with memory. They had found a supply of the batteries and kept the extras under lock and key. The supply of radios was limited to 32 handi talkies, 6 mobile units and 3 mobile/base units. The 6 mobile units had been pulled to act as back up radios for the base units. James had a degree in Computer Science and a 1st class radio technicians' license. Or, at least he'd had one back when there was still a government.

In addition to the business radios, they had an assortment of CB's and 2-meter radios but they had no replacement batteries for the 2-meter handi talkies. While they still had all of the ham gear, they hadn't heard a radio call in a very long time. They kept the Icom R-8500-02 scanning receiver on all of the time, just in case. James had long since removed the cellular frequency block but it didn't make any difference, there wasn't any form of phone service.

The Council of Elders knew that Adobe Creek Villagers weren't the only survivors of the end of the world and had discussed the possibility of mounting an expedition to establish contact with their neighbors. As the older generation, the original founders of the village, died off the Council leaned more and more to mounting that expedition. They had surplus, especially in the food category and had needs to fill. They needed new bat-

teries and several common things they'd used up and couldn't find. Derek was seeking several plants to use as alternative medicines but they weren't native to the area. Thus two things combined to eventually force them to begin to organize the expedition. Their surplus on the one hand and their needs on the other.

"I'm going on that expedition Dad," Josh told Derek.

"You were just elected to office the 4th of July, you're needed here," Derek said.

"You have your new clique with Brenda and James and the 3 of you can hold down the fort while some of us younger people establish trade with the other communities. Besides, you know yourself an expedition of this sort could be dangerous. They're going to need me on that expedition."

"Who would you take on the expedition with you?" Derek asked.

"James's son Clarence for one, he mighty handy with a gun, you know," Josh replied. "And there's Bobby Joe and Jennifer's son, Bobby. Clarence, Bobby and I have gotten to be pretty good friends."

"I think there's some humor in your selections, Josh," Derek observed. "We'd have the sons of The Three Amigos here at the village and the grandsons of The Three Amigos on the road."

"I don't remember much about The Three Amigos, Dad," Josh said, "What's that all about?"

"About 30 years ago, your grandfather started writing fictional accounts of him and his 2 best friends, Brenda's father and James's father," Derek explained. "One of his fellow authors, I think Dad told me it was a guy named Fleataxi, hung a name on the group and referred to them as The Three Amigos. After that your grandfather not only used the name for the group in his stories but the 3 friends more or less adopted it in real life. Now understand, Josh we're talking about 3 men all in their sixties here. Your grandpa's survivalist mentality rubbed off on his friend Ron and Ron really got into gun collecting. Clarence was pretty much along for the ride in the beginning."

"I thought grandpa was sick," Josh said.

"They all were, Josh," Derek explained. "Ron had a bad heart and really high cholesterol. Clarence had diabetes, high blood pressure and a bad heart. Your grandpa had diabetes, a bad spine, neuropathy and trouble with his blood pressure plus several other ailments. All 3 of them smoked cigarettes and 2 of the 3 had Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease in one form or the other. They met in Alcoholics Anonymous and had a special bond. That's why this village refuses to tolerate drunks."

"I'm surprised they were even able to get around," Josh observed.

“They were crusty old guys and they were politically conservative back around the turn of the century when the world went to hell,” Derek continued. “Their general rule was shoot first and ask questions later. The first decade of the 21st Century was a lot of hard times. The United States used to be the most powerful nation in the world. The country itself was divided to along lines called conservative and liberal. The liberals wanted to redistribute the wealth of the country and the conservatives weren’t afraid to try and export our political system to other countries whether they wanted it or not. Add to the mix the differing religions in the world and we were all sitting on a veritable powder keg holding a lit match.”

“Finally, on Sunday, January 7, 2007 Russia and China attacked the United States with nuclear weapons,” Derek continued. “The United States retaliated and the civilized world basically ended on that day. The US had 500 Minuteman III missiles, 50 Peacekeeper missiles with 10 warheads each and 14 Ballistic Missile Submarines with 24 missiles each. They called the standoff a policy of Mutually Assured Destruction in the time when I was born. When it got right down to it, that’s what happened. The three most powerful nations on the earth destroyed each other. I’m pretty sure the radioactive fallout from the weapons they used destroyed much of the remainder of the world.”

“My whole world, that I can remember anyway, has always been centered on this village,” Josh replied. “I always had the impression that the end came in a religious war.”

“The Christians and the Muslims is what you’re referring to, Josh,” Derek replied. “The US was at war with several small Muslim countries at the end but the Muslim nations were very weak and mostly resorted to terrorism. And, it wasn’t all of the Muslims but a vocal minority. The Christian and Muslim religions have the same basic roots.”

“So, are you going to let me go on the expedition?” Josh asked.

“I probably couldn’t stop you, so go ahead,” Derek replied.

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Monday, August 21, 2034, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

It had taken a Council vote and much organizing to set the expedition up. It would be a wagon caravan carrying trade goods. 4-horse teams of the big Belgian horses would pull the wagons and they were taking along a remuda of the Belgians and Morgan’s; some to ride and some to trade. Each wagon would have a driver, relief driver and 2 outriders. Josh would share the scouting duties with Clarence and Bobby. DJ was coming along to look for herbs and cures and to be the Wagon Master. Their trade goods consisted of sacks of grain, hunting rifles and some ammunition for each, a few M16’s and ammo and a small herd of cattle, mostly bred heifers. They carried several cages of cooped chickens and even a few turkeys. They were going to head east along the US 50 and travel to Dodge City, Kansas. One of the wagons even carried a dozen hogs.

The scout would ride ahead and locate the spots where they could layover at night. They were looking to make anywhere from 25 to 40 miles a day on the days they weren't trading. Before they left, they were all equipped with some of the survival guns, mostly the M1A's plus the M16's taken from Barstow so many years before. Each man had an MBR or an AR plus his regular arms. The defensive weapons were kept out of sight but within ready reach. The second driver on each wagon carried a shotgun. The caravan was only 6 wagons and the wagons and outriders numbered 24. There were the 3 scouts and 6 vaqueros to herd the cattle and remuda. When they stopped for the mid-day break, they planned to change out the horses.

You remember those Rottweilers that Clarence had? They were both females that hadn't been neutered. Seems that two of the cops had Rottweilers too. In the course of things, those cops' male Rottweilers got together with Clarence's... Now don't forget Ron's dog Tango and Gary's dog Baby. They hadn't been neutered either. Not all of the bloodlines were pure because the dogs had a mind of their own. On the other hand, by this time they had one hell of a bunch of big, mean, well-trained dogs. Rottweilers, Shepherds, and some mix breeds including Baby's mixed German Short Hair/German Shepherd lineage. They took one dog per man and left the remainder home. That helped a lot with the herding of the horses and cattle.

They left at 7am, planning on making the junction with state route 10 before the lay over at the John Martin Reservoir. It was an easy ride for Josh and he found a nice place to lie over about 5 miles east of Kreybill where the reservoir came right up to the highway. They'd have grazing and plenty of water. He parked himself on US 50 and waited for the wagons to catch up. They had radios with them, the VHF models, and periodically, Josh put out a call until he was able to contact DJ. He told his brother where he was and said he'd gather some wood and get a fire going. Through the night, the 3 scouts and 6 Vaqueros circled the herd of cattle and horses, keeping them together. The horses were hobbled so they couldn't move too far, but they hadn't bothered to stake them this close to home.

"We'd better load up on water here," Josh advised DJ. "I figure we can make Koen tomorrow but that will be a dry camp. We'll cross the river the following day and can water the stock."

"How far is it to Dodge City?" DJ asked.

"Maybe 170 miles, 4 days or maybe 5," Josh replied. "Why?"

"Dad suggested that they probably did some business in old western single action firearms in Dodge City, considering its heritage," DJ replied. "Dad also said the Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association used to be in Dodge City and they always turned out a lot of vendors for single action firearms."

Kansas was farming country so maybe they wouldn't do so well with the livestock or the grain. That's why they also had some hunting rifles and M16's. They didn't have any trouble getting to Dodge City and they found a greatly reduced community of survivors. They did manage to sell the dozen hogs and all of the turkeys. They only sold a few of the hunting rifles, but those M16's were a hot ticket. They came away with a wagonload of loaded ammo, used brass, primers and powder. They traded the turkeys for wheel weights giving them a full ton of the lead blend to cast into bullets.

DJ got with a local doctor and they consulted at length on what he was using as substitute medicines. Derek had mastered producing the IV solutions including D5W, Lactated Ringers and 0.9% Sodium Chloride and DJ had a supply for use and for trade. He came away with a lot of IV sets and a few drugs that had become scarce even though they had an infinite shelf life. They also traded 'recipes' for several homegrown cures. This medical business was the best deal of all because the doctor was a surgeon and he told DJ that now that he had some of the things he needed he could perform surgery when required. They worked out a deal for Adobe Creek Village to supply Dodge City with the IV products on a continuing basis and DJ took an order back to the village on his return.

The next stop was to be Amarillo, TX a distance of about 275 miles. They were figuring on 7-8 days for the second leg of their journey. From there, they were headed back to Adobe Creek Village. In Amarillo, they hoped to sell the three wagonloads of grain and maybe some of the horses. They folks in Dodge City had given them another wagonload of wheat in exchange for some of the cattle.

"Why did you buy wheat when we bought wheat to sell?" Josh asked.

"They were offering more wheat value than we valued the cattle at and I figured we might sell it in Texas, Josh," DJ explained. "We might pick up a bull or two in exchange for our heifers, too. Dad wants to mix up the bloodlines if he can. Have you seen anything that looks like trouble ahead?"

"Hasn't been signs of any," Josh replied. "I figure we'll take 54 down to Liberal and turn south. We might get some trading in Liberal, there were signs of life and from Liberal we can ride south along 83 and then follow 70 south to Pampa. We'll take 60 out of there into Amarillo. There are several places to trade on the way to Amarillo; I just hope we have some goods left to trade when we get there."

"If this route works out well, we can go the reverse way on the next trip," DJ suggested. "I didn't realize how much demand there would be for Dad's homemade IV products. If there are doctor's in Amarillo, you can just about count on our getting a regular route resupplying both Dodge City and Amarillo with the IV solutions."

"Getting new breeding stock will be important," Josh agreed with DJ's early statement. "This is as much a trip to test the waters and find what we have that we can sell or trade and to learn what they have that we need. If we can set up a regular trade route or two, maybe Clarence, Bobby and I can travel out a little further carrying the more popular

items and see more of the country. We were talking about maybe getting further south to Lubbock and maybe south out of there following 87 and 180 over into Hobbs, New Mexico. Maybe see some of those places grandpa wrote about in some of his 3 amigos yarns. We kind of have a new generation of 3 amigos ourselves, you know.”

“Grandpa wrote lots of stories, are there any in particular that interest you Josh?” DJ asked.

“You know, bro, he wrote that *Have Gun, Will Travel* story about those missiles silos in the Roswell area,” Josh replied. “I’ll bet we’ll find survivors there.”

A Present Time – Part III – Chapter Thirty One – Texas

Amarillo was a bit of a disappointment. They had all of the beef they needed, but they did trade one bull for 4 heifers and they bought the remaining grain. DJ picked up enough orders for homemade IV supplies that they could justify a trip back to Amarillo on that basis alone. Derek was very happy to have the orders but they presented a problem. They didn't have a lot of extra plastic bags to hold the IV solutions. A flurry of trips to some blood banks provided them with the 500ml Baxter blood containers. They had thousands of the 500ml bags, enough to keep them in business for years. They also had the 400ml bags they could use when they ran out of the 500ml bags.

Derek had picked up some lab equipment from a hospital and using that equipment and sterile water he had set out to duplicate the 3 primary IV solutions. The lactated ringers had been the most difficult because one of the chemicals it contained. Eventually, however, he managed even that. His production was on a rather small scale but it didn't take a lot of time. Based on the orders DJ had taken on the road he was going to be producing IV solutions 50% of the time. By the time Josh, Bobby and Clarence located the blood bags Derek had produced a large quantity of IV solutions and was just waiting for the bags to hold them.

"Dad, I was talking to DJ and after Amarillo, I think that Bobby, Clarence and I will go on the road for a while," Josh explained. "You won't need us to guard the wagon train or to scout since the routes have been laid out. Is that ok with you?"

"Where are you going Josh?" Derek asked.

"We talked about going to Lubbock and over to Roswell," Josh replied.

"Since you're too young to know who Buddy Holly was, I presume you're going to look for the missile silos," Derek responded. "Am I right?"

"Yes, that's why we're going to Roswell," Josh said. "Grandpa wrote about it in *Have Gun, Will Travel*."

"Fine, but I want you to consider something, Josh," Derek continued. "The people who bought those silos were no doubt survivalist orientated. You want to approach people like that nice and easy. They tend to follow your grandpa's rule about shooting first."

"I thought maybe we could take a peace offering of sorts," Josh replied. "Could we have some of your IV solutions and medicines?"

"I'll let you take 2 cases of each solution," Derek said. "You can divide them between 3 pack animals and fill in with lighter things. Each box will contain 6 liters of fluid and weigh about 15 pounds. When Clarence and Dad went to California on that last trip, they each led 3 pack animals. It was a little much for them, but they made it. You kids can probably handle 3 apiece with no problem, but load them light."

“Should we take AR’s or MBR’s?” Josh asked.

“What are you best with?” Derek inquired.

“My Winchester, Dad, you know that,” Josh said.

“Take your Rugers and your Winchester and I’ll dig around and find you each a Cruiser model shotgun,” Derek suggested. “That is a shotgun with a 14” barrel and a pistol grip. It’s only good for close up work, but I’d feel better if you took them. They are Mossberg 590A1 shotguns and they hold 6 shots. I’ll give you some of the Federal 2¾” #1 buckshot and it will make them easier to handle.”

“Why that shell?” Josh asked.

“Studies have shown that the Federal 2¾” #1 Buckshot is the most damaging load,” Derek replied. “It has adequate penetration to take out the major organs and 16 pellets. Buckshot pellets are numbered from the smallest No. 4 (.24 inches) to the largest at 000 (.36 inches). The categories between No. 4 Buckshot and 000 Buckshot include No. 3 Buckshot (.25), No. 2 Buckshot at (.27 inches), No. 1 Buckshot (.30 inches), No. 0 (.32); 00 Buckshot (.33 inches) and 000 Buckshot (.36 inches). So the pellets aren’t that much smaller, but you get 16 instead of 9 or 12. If it were I, I’d use 2 buckshot shells and a slug followed by 2 more buckshot shells and a slug. You get the best of both worlds that way. I found an article on use of a shotgun for home defense in your grandpa’s papers.”

“What was grandpa like?” Josh asked.

“Rebellious as all get out. He went into the Air Force when he graduated high school even though he was scheduled to go to college,” Derek said. “He had problems in college because he was a drunk, but he met and married my mother there. It’s a long story I won’t go into but he ended up with a BA and a MBA. Then, he became a tax auditor for the state of Iowa. Mom walked out on him and he eventually remarried Sharon. It took him a long time to sober up but he finally did in 1999. Like I told you he was conservative politically and a real smart ass. He always claimed he had a PhD in sarcasm.”

“Did he?” Josh asked.

“Not really, it was more like 2 levels above a PhD, if you can believe it,” Derek said. “I liked that about him and tried to copy it but I could never quite get there. Now, you take his best friend Ron, for example. The 2 of them must have gone to the same sarcasm school. Clarence was soft and mellow, but you remember Clarence.”

“Never heard him say a harsh word,” Josh replied.

“He was always good humored and even smiled when he shot someone,” Derek laughed. “Your grandpa would shoot anyone who deserved it and then say ‘frig ‘em if

they can't take a joke'. You need to find a balance Josh. Don't hesitate to shoot if the situation calls for it but avoid trouble when you can."

"I'll only shoot when it's necessary," Josh said. "Someone could always be faster than me. Who was this Paladin that grandpa wrote about?"

"Paladin was a character in a TV show played by an actor named Richard Boone," Derek explained. "Listen to this song, and I'll answer any questions you have."

*Have Gun Will Travel reads the card of a man.
A knight without armor in a savage land.*

*His fast gun for hire heeds the calling wind.
A soldier of fortune is the man called Paladin.*

*Paladin, Paladin Where do you roam?
Paladin, Paladin, Far, far from home.
He travels on to wherever he must
A chess knight of silver is his badge of trust*

*There are campfire legends that the trailmen spin
Of the man with the gun
Of the man called Paladin*

*Paladin Paladin Where do you roam?
Paladin Paladin Far, far from home
Far from home. Far from home.*

"A paladin is a knight and the TV character was a hired gun who only took just causes," Derek explained the song. Your grandpa had a paladin holster. As a matter of fact, he had 2. He got the manufacturer to make him a crossdraw holster with a paladin on it. Would you rather wear them than the Laredoan rig?"

"I stick with what I'm used to," Josh replied. "But I could take the Paladin rig for a back-up."

"You can take the nickel-plated Colts, too," Derek suggested. "The only real difference between those rigs is that one has Conchos and one has Paladins."

"4 six guns, a rifle and a shotgun are going to really weigh me down," Josh said.

"That's why you have saddle bags and pack animals, Josh," Derek laughed. "Pick a pair to wear and pack the others away."

Josh was reluctant to carry all of the hardware. He tried on the Paladin rig and it fit every bit as well as the Laredoan. So he wore it to the range and checked to see how it af-

fectured his draw. There was no difference, so he decided to wear that rig instead. He thought the nickel-plated Colts were gaudy so he decided to leave them home. When finally they had the IV solutions ready to deliver, the 3 friends had horses selected and ready to go. They fussed a bit making their loads as light as possible so they could haul the 6 cases of IV solution Derek suggested they take. 6 cases of the IV solutions weighed only 80 pounds so they put them all on a single packhorse. Since a pack animal can carry as much as 175 lbs for a short trip of 10-12 miles and 150 lbs for a long haul of up to 20 - 25 miles in a day the possibilities for comfort are unlimited.

Clarence, Bobbie and Josh didn't think that way. The most they'd burden their animals was 120-pounds each. Considering that part of the trip would be through desert country where water might be scarce, they needed to carry grain and water for the animals. By the time they were ready to go, they had divided their food and water between 3 of the pack animals, a 4th had the IV supplies and some more grain. The remaining animals carried their camping supplies, extra ammo, water and grain. Even if they somehow lost an animal, they could redistribute the loads and continue on. And, as the trip progressed, the loads on the packhorses would lighten considerably. Still with 9 packhorses carrying about 120 pounds each, they had ½ ton of supplies.

The small wagon train carrying the trading supplies finally set off for Amarillo. The 3 friends accompanied them as far as Amarillo and then broke off and headed south. Each of the men had 5 Maple Leafs in a money belt and one roll each of silver dimes quarters and halves in their saddle bags, just in case. They were planning on a 4-day trip from Amarillo to Lubbock, a distance of about 120 miles. 2½ days out, they came to Plainview, principally an agricultural community. They'd had good grazing for the horses so far and hadn't used much of the grain in their panniers. They'd also crossed 5 rivers and water wasn't a problem.

In Plainview they stopped at a saloon like "Miss Kitty's" to have a cold drink. Nobody enforced any of the Texas County option laws any more when it came to alcoholic beverages. The Three Amigos were sitting at a table enjoying a beer when some local roughneck made a crack about the leather Josh was wearing.

"Ignore him Josh, he's 3 sheets in the wind," Clarence suggested.

"He's just some local asshole with too much booze," Bobby added.

"I'm trying but he isn't giving up easy," Josh replied.

"What are you, a yellow bellied coward?" the drunk taunted.

The drunk was probably in his mid-40s and just an average sort of guy with a belly full of rotgut. He looked to be about Josh's size, 5'10. Clarence, you should know was about the size and condition of his father, James, maybe an inch taller at 6'3 and maybe about 5 pounds of extra muscle. He was no one you wanted to meet up with in a dark

alley late at night. Bobby was 6'1 and not a slouch either, come to think of it. Bobby stood first.

"Why don't you just move along and let it be?" he suggested to the drunk.

"Hiding behind your friends, shrimp?" he taunted Josh.

Clarence stood up next, a little fire in his eyes.

"My friend suggested that you move along," Clarence said.

The bartender in the saloon came around the end of the bar with a half pool cue in his hand, the heavy half.

"Sit down Bill before you start something you can't finish," he told the drunk.

"Stay out of this, Sam" Bill told the bartender.

"POP" was the sound of the bartender laying that pool cue on Bill's head.

"Somebody go get the town Marshal," the bartender said. "Sorry about that, fellas, old Bill's had a little too much to drink. Want another beer? It's on the house."

"No thank you," Josh replied.

"I'll take another," Clarence and Bobby said in unison.

The Marshal showed up a few minutes later and hauled Bill to the jail to sleep it off. Then he returned to the saloon and sat at the table.

"Where are you boys from?" the Marshal asked.

"Adobe Creek Village, Colorado," Josh replied.

"Never heard of the place, where is that?" the Marshal asked.

"It a small town set up next to Adobe Creek Reservoir about 30 years ago," Josh explained. "I was the Village Marshal until Bobby, Clarence and I decided to take this trip."

A Present Time – Part III – Chapter Thirty Two – New Mexico

“Mighty nice leather you have there,” the Marshal observed. “Something familiar about it, but I can’t think of just what.”

“In the late 1950’s there was a television show called *Have Gun, Will Travel*,” Josh replied. “My grandfather bought the Paladin holster rig and then had it modified to include this crossdraw holster.”

“Sam, bring me a beer,” the Marshal called to the bartender. “Where are you boys headed?”

“We’re going to Lubbock and then over to Roswell, Marshal,” Bobby replied.

“I’d be careful in Roswell if I were you,” the Marshal said. “Thanks, Sam. The people over there at the old Walker AFB who owned those silos got attacked a few years back and there’s some kind of gang over there headed up by a Warlord. By the way, what’s your name?”

“Josh Olsen, Marshal, what’s yours?” Josh responded.

“My name is Marshall Thomas,” the Marshal replied.

“So you’re Marshal Marshall Thomas,” Josh chuckled. “My grandfather wrote some fiction stories with a US Marshal named Marshall Thomas in them.”

“Was your grandfather from California?” Thomas asked.

“Yes, why?” Josh replied.

“My grandfather was a US Deputy Marshal in the Los Angeles area,” Thomas explained.

“It could be the same guy,” Josh explained. “Grandpa used to use real people in his stories and sometimes he changed their names and others he just used their real names.”

“Was your grandfather’s first name Gary?” Marshall asked.

“As a matter of fact yes,” Josh replied.

“Small world isn’t it,” Marshall said. “Like I was telling you about Roswell, you be real careful over there. Those people are armed with all kinds of military arms and ordinance.”

“We have some of those back at the village but my Dad suggested we not bring them,” Josh explained.

“Like I said,” Marshall responded, “That’s a pretty fancy gun rig you have. Are you as good with it as its appearance would suggest?”

“I don’t really have anything to compare it to,” Josh admitted.

“I’m the fastest man in this town,” Marshall said. “How about we load our guns up with blanks and find out?”

“Sounds fair to me,” Josh said, “You mind if one of these two load the guns?”

“Fine by me,” Marshall replied. “I run over to the jail and get a box of blanks.”

A few minutes later Bobby was loading the two guns Josh had and the single SAA the Marshal was wearing with the blank cartridges. Clarence would count to three and the two men would draw. They squared off about 25’ apart and Clarence started counting.

“One.”

“Two.”

“Three.”

“Bang” went Josh’s crossdraw Colt. The Marshal’s gun was just out of his holster.

“You’re fast,” Marshall said. “But are you accurate?”

“Let’s do the same test over using real bullets and we’ll both shoot at a target,” Josh suggested.

Josh missed the dead center of the target by about 2” on the second test and Marshall wasn’t any more accurate. The range was 25’.

“Come over to the jail,” Marshal suggested.

At the jail a few minutes later, Marshall reached into a drawer and pulled out 3 Deputy US Marshal badges.

“Most people don’t realize that we still have a little of our government left,” he explained. “When the Russians and Chinese attacked back in 2007, most of the government was wiped out. However, a few people survived and that included several members of the Marshal’s Service. The military took over running the country but there wasn’t much they could do. Long story short, they installed a civilian government but it was, until very recently, powerless. That government finally took power about a year ago and they’ve been trying to reestablish some law and order using the Marshal’s Service. I am the US Marshal for the state of Texas and I’m offering the 3 of you a chance to become US

Deputy Marshals. That hellhole over in Roswell needs to be cleaned up and since the 3 of you are determined to go there anyway, I think I should give you the legal powers to do what you need to. What do you have to say?"

"I'll do it," Josh replied totally astonished.

"Count us in," Clarence spoke for Bobby and himself.

"Raise your right hands and repeat after me," Marshall said.

"I, state your name, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

"Here you go fellas," Marshall said. "Now before I turn you loose on the world, I have a booklet you have to read. The booklets contain the only federal crimes remaining on the books. I'll tell you one thing before your get started, there aren't many. The basic law of the land is the original Constitution and the Amendments. But, I'm going to make it simple for you. Killing and stealing are against the federal law, as is treason. Everything else is a local question and you are not to interfere in local affairs."

"So what do we do with killers and thieves?" Clarence asked.

"Try to bring them in, but if they resist, kill them," US Marshal Marshall Thomas said. "Any questions?"

"What's the pay for this job?" Bobby asked.

"Fifteen silver dollars a month and expenses up to another thirty silver dollars a month," Thomas replied. "That's roughly equivalent to \$1,500 a month plus expenses."

"Eighteen thousand dollars a year isn't a lot of money," Josh suggested. "Or, is it?"

"Thirty years ago it would have been equal to about \$72,000 a year," Marshall replied. "It's good money fellas, but you'll earn every penny. Now, if you pick up a prisoner, you can park him in any operating jail you find and bring him back to Lubbock on your way home. Most of the local lawmen you run into will also be Deputy US Marshals but they will be wearing a local badge."

"How can we tell if they're federal or just local?" Bobby asked. "Do you have a secret handshake or something?"

“Ask if they are a friend of Bill,” Marshall said. “If they are a federal officer, they’ll ask you if you mean Bill Wilson. You tell them yes and they’ll tell you to call them Dr. Bob. We sort of borrowed an idea of my grandfather’s after he met the original 3 amigos.”

“They all died sober you know,” Josh said. “Ron had a heart attack, Gary got shot in the back by a rustler and died from a staph infection and Clarence died of old age in 2022.”

“Glad to hear it,” Marshall said. “You keep those badges out of sight. Someone might decide they make good aiming points. I’ve got some badge cases around here somewhere you can carry them in. Now, I need to take your pictures with my digital camera and print Identification Cards for you, you first Josh. Take your hat off and toe that white line over there.”

A few minutes later, Marshall handed each of the 3 men what amounted to a plastic card with their names and other information embossed on the front along with their pictures. The backside of the cards contained a holographic image of a US Deputy Marshal’s badge. In the short span of 3-4 hours, The Three Amigos went from being saddle tramps out looking for a little adventure to full-fledged US Deputy Marshals. Marshall advanced them each 15 silver dollars as expenses and told them to get receipts for everything they spent. Payday was the first of every month.

“Now boys, let me tell you something,” Marshall said. “We do things a little different these days and as you can see, we don’t do a lot of paperwork. If you violate that oath of office you took, you’re looking at a hanging, just as soon as the judge says you’re guilty. On the other hand, we don’t have a US Marshal for Colorado yet, so if your mission to Roswell is a success, one of you may end up being the US Marshal for the state of Colorado and the other two his Chief Deputies.”

“We’ll head out first thing in the morning, Marshal,” Josh suggested.

“You’ll head out on Texas 62 for about 40 miles where you will pick US 82,” Marshall explained. “Follow it west about 134 miles and you’ll be in Roswell. I suggest you take wagons for your goods and to haul any prisoners back in. Stop by the livery and tell them I said to fix you up with 2 wagons and harnesses for 2 6-horse teams.”

“Anything else?” Josh asked.

“Try to avoid getting yourselves killed,” Marshal chuckled. “If you’re trying to find Walker AFB on a map, it was converted to an air park and industrial center years ago. It’s about 4 miles south of town. That’s where that Warlord and his people are. I’ll look around and see if I can come up with a map of the area. Those silos are in that same area.”

Over dinner at a café, Clarence looked Josh straight in the eye and asked, “Just what in the hell have we gotten ourselves into?”

"I'm not sure, Clarence, but I'm putting that darned Paladin rig away and wearing the Laredoan from now on," Josh grinned.

"You're a day late and a dollar short, aren't you?" Bobby laughed. "There's 3 of us and God only knows how many of them."

"The thing that really shocked me was that there is still a government," Josh said.

"Then I imagine we'll just have to be a little sneaky," Clarence winked at them.

"I'm sure happy that I speak Spanish," Bobby added. "We get to New Mexico and we might just find out that México reclaimed part of their country."

"The Marshal would have told us if we were going up against a bunch of Méxicans, wouldn't he?" Josh asked. "Besides we all speak English and Spanish because of our Vaqueros."

"He didn't say one way or the other, come to think of it," Clarence pointed out. "Maybe Bobby has a point. Who's to say what's happened to the southwestern US over the last 30 years?"

"Wouldn't the military have kept them out?" Josh asked.

"What military, Josh?" Clarence retorted. "The only military I know about is what that Marshal told us about. You would have thought that if the military was running things, we would have seen more of them."

"Wasn't there talk at one time back when our grandfathers were alive and active about some Méxican invasion?" Bobby asked.

"It was called the Aztlán invasion, if I recall," Josh said. "The theory went something like this: While American troops engaged al-Qaeda terrorist cells in far-flung battlefields across Asia and our military leadership prepared for a Gulf War encore against Iraq, our 'friend' and 'neighbor' to the South was relentlessly invading our homeland. The Méxican government and radical 'Chicano' groups in this country are pursuing the dream of La Reconquista – the 'reconquest' of the southwestern United States.

"More than a century after the US invasion of Mexico that resulted in the annexation of Texas, Mexicans are 'reoccupying' the territory, but through less violent means and for different reasons," reported Monica Mendel of TheNewsMexico.com news service on March 25th, 2002. "Most of these immigrants live in border states like California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, the same ones Mexico lost when President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna signed an agreement to end the US invasion in 1848 by ceding 2.5 million square kilometers of Mexican territory to the United States.

“But columnist Carlos Loret de Mola most clearly explained Mexico’s ‘demographic warfare’ strategy 20 years ago in *Excelsior* (the Mexican equivalent of the New York Times). In an essay entitled ‘The Great Invasion: Mexico Recovers Its Own,’ Loret described the strategy in brutally candid terms:

“A peaceful mass of people... carries out slowly and patiently an unstoppable invasion, the most important in human history. You cannot give me a similar example of such a large migratory wave by an ant-like multitude, stubborn, unarmed, and carried on in the face of the most powerful and best-armed nation on earth.... [Neither] barbed-wire fences, nor aggressive border guards, nor campaigns, nor laws, nor police raids against the undocumented, have stopped this movement of the masses that is unprecedented in any part of the world.

“This migrant invasion,” continued Loret, ‘seems to be slowly returning [the southwestern United States] to the jurisdiction of Mexico without the firing of a single shot, nor requiring the least diplomatic action, by means of a steady, spontaneous, and uninterrupted occupation.’ The effects of Mexico’s immigration invasion were even then visible in Los Angeles, which Loret archly referred to as ‘the second largest Mexican city in the world’.”

“Charles Truxillo, a professor of ‘Chicano Studies’ at the University of New Mexico, believed that Los Angeles would one day be the capital of ‘La Republica del Norte’ – a Hispanic nation straddling the border between the southwest United States and northern Mexico. The envisioned ‘Chicano homeland’ would absorb the existing U.S. states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, and southern Colorado, as well as ‘the northern tier of current Mexican states: Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas,’ reported the March 10, 2002 Albuquerque News.

“The envisioned ‘Chicano homeland’ was also referred to as Aztlán. The geographical boundaries for the proposed homeland had not been precisely defined; in addition to the U.S. states cited by the Albuquerque News, Nevada and Utah had also been mentioned.

“The new polity won’t appear ‘within the next 20 years but within 80 years,’ predicted Truxillo. ‘I may not live to see the Hispanic homeland, but by the end of the century my students will live in it, sovereign and free.’ While Truxillo maintained that the new country should be created ‘by any means necessary,’ he insisted that it was ‘unlikely’ that it will be born out of a civil war. Instead, he foresees that “La Republica del Norte” will be created ‘by political process, by the electoral pressure of the future majority Hispanic population,’ observed the Albuquerque News.”

The Three Amigos agreed that things might get very interesting when they got to New Mexico.

A Present Time – Part III – Chapter Thirty Three – Roswell

The Three Amigos were around early the next morning. After arranging the horses into teams according to the horses' training, they hitched up the wagons, loaded their gear and headed to Roswell. They reached the junction of US 380 in late afternoon and stopped for the night. After staking out the horses and eating dinner, they visited about how to handle whatever they came up against in Roswell.

"I doubt we can take on a gang of any size head on," Josh observed.

"If these people are organized in any way, they'll probably have some sort of guard force protecting their perimeter," Bobby suggested.

"Good deal, fellas," Clarence added, "We have our Bowie knives and we'll turn Indian on them. If we do this right, they'll think they're being harassed by a bunch of Comanche's."

"How are we going to make them think that it's Indians?" Josh asked puzzled by Clarence's suggestion.

"We'll scalp the guys we take out," Clarence replied with an evil little smile.

"Well, the idea has possibilities," Josh admitted. "We'd better not get too far into the planning of what we're going to do until we see what were up against."

"It's a good thing the Marshal caught us before we left," Bobby said. "If we tried to follow his original directions, we'd have been lost for sure."

"It makes more sense, however," Josh replied. "He said it was 47 miles from Caprock to Roswell. By taking 82 to Artesia and coming in from the south, we should find one or more ghost towns and can put up in one of them."

"If you ask me," Bobby said, "That Marshal didn't seem to be too well organized. I just hope we're not heading into trouble we can't handle. I'll have to tell you, Josh, I like Clarence's idea of acting like a band of marauding Indians."

"I'm not opposed to the idea, Bobby, but I think that we should wait and see if we can pull something like that off," Josh replied.

Five days later...

The Three Amigos were in a ghost town named Dexter, NM. It was just a few miles down the road from Roswell. From the looks of things, whoever was running Roswell had been through the town several years before because there were skeletal remains everywhere. What little bit that remained of the town had been thoroughly looted. The

friends set up shop in a local store and found a place to put up their horses. To this point, they believed that their presence had gone undetected.

Early the next morning they were up and around when they heard what sounded like motorcycles off in the distance. They took cover and waited anxiously as the roar grew louder. About a dozen fellas rode slowly through Dexter on motorcycles, a tri-wheeler and a couple of ATV's. Fortunately the horses were off the main road a ways and didn't spook at the sound. Some of the men had M-16's or AK-47's and others had sawed-off shotguns. The Three Amigos had never seen a raunchy bunch like this in their entire lives. They had long flowing hair held out of their eyes by bandanas and looked filthy. They also had a look of meanness about them and appeared, to a man, to have been weightlifters. They cruised through town slowly, looking around and continued south out of Dexter.

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"That almost had the appearance of being a routine patrol," Josh remarked when they were gone.

"There's no way the three of us could take on that bunch," Clarence said.

"I wonder what they were running those bikes on." Bobby mused.

"We can't say that Thomas didn't warn us," Josh added. "We're going to have to take time scouting this place out. Clarence I think your idea about acting like a bunch of Comanche's might be our best bet as the way to handle this. I brought my deerskin moccasins to wear at night instead of my boots. I also packed our compound bows and some arrows so we could go bow hunting, but I never imagined doing something like this."

"Did you bring the tomahawks, too?" Bobby chuckled.

"Yes, but I didn't bring the spears," Josh replied.

"I have my moccasins too," Clarence said.

Dexter is located at the junction of state roads 256 and 560; 560 runs straight west and junctions US 285 just a few miles south of the old Roswell Industrial Air Center. About due west of the Industrial Air Park is a reservoir. Josh, Clarence and Bobby decided to move their operation to the reservoir because it would give them a place with lots of water for their animals and wasn't connected by any roads except some roads running south from state 380 to the west of Roswell. This meant that they be running cross-country between the reservoir and the Park. Early in the afternoon, they hitched up the teams and made the short journey.

The reservoir is dry except for limited storage during spring runoffs. Two Rivers Dam was constructed to protect the town of Roswell, New Mexico from disastrous floods. The project was named Two Rivers because it consists of two separate earthen dams that form one reservoir. One dam is on the Rio Hondo River and the other on the Rocky Arroyo. Construction was completed in 1963 at a cost of \$5 million dollars and proved its worth during floods in 1965 and 1991. Both dams measure a total of 7825 feet in length and have a drainage area of over 1000 miles. Two Rivers is a dry reservoir and has limited water only during spring runoffs or during extreme floods – swimming or fishing is not allowed. There are picnic shelters available for day use, restrooms, as well as many scenic views to spot antelope, birds, and other wildlife. Two Rivers is located 14 miles west of Roswell, NM on US 70/380. Continue another seven miles south on the project access road to reach the day use area. Two Rivers is located 90 miles northeast from Carlsbad and 131 miles from Alamogordo, NM.

Things had changed during the 70-odd years since the dams had been built and there was a little water in the reservoir; not a lot, but they could get by. They made camp on the south side away from any finished roads and called it a night. The next morning they took care of the process of becoming 'Indians'. Josh assembled the compound bows and passed out the arrows and tomahawks. They were wearing their moccasins so they wouldn't leave any tracks on the baked soil, but there wasn't much they could do about the horses being shod. What they were to discover over the next few hours was nothing short of amazing.

You might ask what an Indian looks like in 2034. Like anyone else of course, but The Three Amigos were having fun playing the parts and it did help to ease their tension. They rode east to about a mile from the Air Park and found a place to settle their Morgan's. From there, the journey was all on foot, moving slow and cautiously. When they arrived within view of the Air Park their real education began. There were about 3-400 hundred of those filthy bad guys in the Air Park area as far as they could tell through binoculars. There were more people at the Air Park consisting of a mixture of Latino and Caucasians. 'Anglos' might be an apt description of the Caucasians. This latter group of people was engaged in menial tasks and under the watchful eye of the BG's.

"Looks like they're using slave labor," Josh pointed out.

"They're running perimeter security too," Clarence said. "Do you see those watchtowers?"

"What's that thing over there?" Bobby asked. "It sort of looks like Aunt Brenda's still."

"Maybe that's where they get the fuel for their vehicles," Josh suggested. "They could have converted them to run on ethanol. Let's just stay here through the night and get a feel for their operation. After dark, one of you go bring up the horses so we won't be stuck here on foot."

Their observations revealed that while the BG's had patrols and security, it was pretty laid back. They were all armed with some sort of machinegun or assault rifle and an assortment of handguns. Some of them were even wearing machetes. The Three Amigos took turns keeping watch with two of them sleeping and one of them observing. During the early evening hours, they could hear Spanish language music playing loudly in the Air Park. That settled down around 10pm and the BG's drifted off to get some sleep. Before dawn, they saddled up and headed back to the reservoir.

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"I'd say that we're outnumbered about 100 to 1," Josh started off when they got back to the reservoir and were eating breakfast.

"That could be 150 to 1, easy enough," Bobby said. "And a bunch of bows and arrows aren't going to do us much good against assault rifles and machineguns."

"Everything we need is back at Adobe Creek Village," Clarence pointed out. "I realize that it would take us about a month to get up there and back, but I'd feel a whole lot better if we had different weapons. We talked about observing this group for as long as it took, but I saw enough last night to tell me we know enough already."

"Yeah, Josh, we could leave the wagons here and ride the horses in relays," Bobby suggested. "If we traveled light and fast, we could be home in maybe 8 days."

"We'll leave tomorrow," Josh said. "We'd better check the horses over very carefully if we're going to be relay riding them."

◦

Eight Days Later, Adobe Creek Village...

"What the hell?" Derek said as the three young men rode in. "Hey fellas, what brings you back here so soon and in such a hurry?"

"Come on over to Miss Kitty's and we'll fill you in," Josh told his Dad.

Several hours later...

"So were they running the vehicles on straight ethanol?" Derek asked.

"No, it was some sort of blend, Dad," Josh said. "We watched them mix up a tank full of the stuff. They put 15 cans of something, maybe gasoline, in a large tank and added 85 cans of ethanol."

"They were probably making E85, Josh," Derek explained. "We have some military vehicles with multi-fuel engines that could run on pure ethanol in a pinch. They're the 2½-

ton trucks. We also produce biodiesel, but not very much. What's this business about the 3 of you being Deputy US Marshals?"

"You ever meet a US Marshal named Marshall Thomas?" Josh asked.

"Yes, I did, why?" Derek said.

"His grandson is the US Marshal for the state of Texas and he is based in Lubbock," Josh answered.

"Why wouldn't he be based in Austin or in Dallas or Houston?" Derek asked. "That sounds a little strange."

"Anyway, we have an assignment to clean up Roswell, New Mexico," Clarence interrupted. "We been there and there must be about 400 Hispanic gang bangers running the town. We came home to get better weapons and maybe a little help."

"We can give you modern weapons if that's what you're looking for," Derek replied. "Our vehicles are in good condition but pretty short of supplies, as is fuel. I suppose we could make a trip to Denver and get some of the old gasoline. If PRI-G works as advertised, it can be restored. The same thing goes for diesel fuel. We can blend it with our biodiesel and produce a superior fuel. We haven't used the vehicles very much trying to save them for a time when we needed them."

"I think maybe that time has come," Josh suggested.

"They cached a lot of things out in Barstow," Derek pointed out. "Dad and the others didn't want to bother with the stuff but they thought it might come in handy someday. They put away .50 caliber machine guns, Mk-19 grenade launchers and a long list of military ordnance. We never went after it because we never saw the need. Right about now, I wish I had an old M1A1 Abrams tank."

"Can't you get one at Ft. Hood?" Josh asked.

"Tell me again what that Marshal said about the military," Derek replied.

Josh and the others related everything that Marshal Marshall Thomas had told them about the US government and the military. By the time they were finished, Derek was shaking his head.

"That's a crock, Josh," Derek replied. "The last of the military anyone saw was 25 years ago. I believe that the 3 of you are US Deputy Marshals, but there is a lot to the story that he didn't tell you. I'll talk to Brenda and James and we'll get things organized on fuel. You boys are going to have to take a crew and make a run out to Barstow and get that cached ordnance. You need to send a rider down to Thomas and tell him what you found and that you're in the process of assembling the things you need to clear up the

problem. I wish your grandfather were alive to see all of this activity. He'd be in hog heaven."

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4 weeks later...

They still had no idea what was really going on with the country, but The Three Amigos and the Three Old Amigos were ready to tackle anything. Derek had gathered all kinds of fuel and restored it. They had gone to Ft. Hood and gotten 4 M1A2 tanks and the ordnance to go along with them. Josh and his group had brought back more cached matériel from Barstow than they had to begin with. Those 4 tanks required a group of 16 men to crew them and altogether they only could spare about 100 people. The little booklet Thomas had them read had said that in an emergency they could raise a posse to run down a BG.

So, off they went, with a 4 HETS carrying the tanks and 2 semi tractor-trailers hauling extra supplies. Plus 16,000-gallons of B-20 blended biodiesel and all of the Hummers they could round up. The tank platoon is the smallest maneuver element within a tank company. Organized to fight as a unified element, the platoon consists of four main battle tanks organized into two sections, with two tanks in each section. The platoon leader (Tank 1) and platoon sergeant (Tank 4) are the section leaders. Tank 2 is the wingman in the platoon leader's section, and Tank 3 is the wingman in the platoon sergeant's section. The tank platoon is organic to tank companies and armored cavalry troops. Under battlefield conditions, the wingman concept facilitates control of the platoon when it operates in sections. The concept requires that one tank orient on another tank on either its left or right side. In the absence of specific instructions, wingmen move, stop, and shoot when their leaders do. In the tank platoon, Tank 2 orients on the platoon leader's tank, while Tank 3 orients on the platoon sergeant's tank. The platoon sergeant orients on the platoon leader's tank.

The 100 or so residents from Adobe Creek Village weren't wearing jeans and work shirts anymore. They had on BDU's, Interceptor vests and looked like a couple of platoons of US military ala 2007. And, they were off to rescue the residents of Roswell, NM based on a single day's worth of intelligence assembled by 3 of their men. Seven hours later, they were on the outskirts of Roswell where they stopped and unloaded their tanks.

"It's too late in the day to start a battle so let's just spend the night here," Derek suggested. "I'm going to send some folks down to recon the town and that Air Park to see what we're up against. You 3 boys stay here and we'll try and develop a plan of attack based on what you saw."

"Sure, Dad, Josh responded. "We made up this map of the positions down at the Air Park."

“Did you check out the town?” Derek asked.

“No, we didn’t take the time,” Josh admitted.

“But we have to go through the town to get to that Air Park, isn’t that so?” Derek wondered aloud.

“You have 4 tanks,” Josh pointed out.

“Josh, I having a nagging feeling that things might not be as they appear,” Derek replied. “How old of a fella was the US Marshal over in Lubbock?”

“About our age,” Josh guessed.

“So he could be the grandson of that US Marshal out in California, I guess,” Derek admitted. “Still, we didn’t see any sign of military when we were at Ft. Hood picking of those 4 tanks. That place has been deserted for years. There was everything we needed just sitting there. My gut is telling me that there’s more to the story than the military running the country for 20 odd years and some civilians taking over. Back when the world ended it was a very different place than it is today. You could tell if a politician was lying if his lips were moving, or so the old joke went. You boys haven’t seen much of the country or the world the way it used to be. I never bought into all of the conspiracy theories, but there was another old saying that went, just because you’re paranoid, it doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you. When this operation is over, we’re going to Lubbock and find out what is really going on.”

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Assuming they wouldn’t be up against a lot of armor, Derek had loaded the tanks out with 30 rounds of M1028 Canister, 5 rounds of M831A1 HEAT and 5 rounds of M829A2 Sabot. He had more HEAT and Sabot rounds available as reloads, but based on the information Josh and the others had provided, this appeared to be armor against infantry. He positioned the 4 tanks in a wing fighting formation and established a perimeter to protect their small camp. Technically, Josh, Clarence and Bobby were in charge, but they hadn’t had any military training and this wasn’t a situation that called for amateurs.

Derek sent 6 of their vaqueros into Roswell, principally because they would blend in. When they returned, they told quite the story. A few years after the world ended, a Mexican gang had infiltrated and taken over Roswell. Some of the surviving residents were Mexican immigrants and they joined the BG and helped them take over. There was some resistance from Anglos and Hispanic Americans but they were defeated and enslaved. The operation was run out of the Air Park and it was well protected against assaults. The guard towers were equipped with Mark-19’s or Ma Deuces. The hangers contained a small fleet of Hummers equipped with the 2 types of machineguns and some TOW missiles.

To make the situation even worse, the BG's had an early warning system that put them on full alert if an opposing force approached the town from any direction. They had drills about once a month and while they might give the outward appearance of being nothing more than a band of ruffians, apparently many of them had a military background. The M220 TOW missiles had a no maintenance shelf life of about 20 years. Depending on the version, they could defeat reactive armor or fly-over, shoot-down, defeating the Abrams tanks. Derek decided to pull 10 of the canister rounds, the 5 Sabot rounds and substitute 15 additional rounds of HEAT.

"I think we'll take the town and let them come to us," Derek outlined his plan of attack. "These people won't dare to let an opposing force occupy Roswell for very long. We're going to have to hide the tanks until we have defeated any of the TOW missile equipped Hummers. We'll attack at dawn and grab the city."

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The following morning the formation of tanks and Hummers entered Roswell meeting little resistance. In a brief firefight, the folks from Colorado quickly defeated the BG's guarding the community. The tanks went to ground on the south side of town, two on each side of the road out of direct view. Fifteen minutes later, the Mexican Calvary arrived led by TOW and Mark-19 equipped Hummers. It took the people from Colorado over 3 hours to destroy the TOW equipped Hummers. They worked their way down the food chain, targeting the Mark-19 equipped Hummers next. By early afternoon, they were ready to assault the Air Park.

The casualty ratio to this point of the engagement was about 25 to 1 in favor of the people from Colorado. They'd lost some of their Hummers to the Mark-19's in the early hours of the engagement. DJ and his small group of medics had all of the casualties they could handle, especially considering the lack of 'modern' medical resources. The assault on the Air Park began with the tanks taking out the towers. They were reluctant to enter the Air Park itself because of rumors of anti-tank mines. The Hummers, and some dismounted infantry, handled the initial assault that followed. When the way was confirmed clear of anti-tank mines, Derek moved his 4 tanks in and they tackled the hangers one by one. Much of the armaments used by the opposition was of old Soviet design and aside from losing the track on one of the tanks to an RPG-7, by late evening, the BG's had been defeated.

In the latter stages of the fighting, the casualty ratio rose. They worked late into the night collecting the weapons and distributing them to the civilian population of Roswell. The BG's experienced 100% fatalities while the Coloradoans lost only 6 men to their wounds. They had another dozen or more wounded but they were being treated at the hospital there in Roswell and were expected to recover.

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"I'm too old for this stuff," Derek said the following morning. "I need to settle down and get married and leave the fighting to you young guys."

"You talking about Brenda, Dad?" Josh asked. "It's about time the two of you settled down."

"Yeah, she and I are pretty good friends," Derek admitted. "But first, we have to get this show on the road and check out things in Lubbock and find out what's really going on from this Marshal Thomas of yours."

A Present Time – Part III – Chapter Thirty Four – Back to Lubbock

Derek showed them how to repair the tread on the Abrams and they loaded them back aboard the M1070/M1000 HETS. DJ was going to stay in Roswell and transport the wounded people back to Adobe Creek Village. Josh, Clarence and Bobby dug out their western apparel and strapped their six guns back on. It was only a short 2-hour drive back to Lubbock. This time they wouldn't be riding their Morgan horses because the horses were still in Adobe Creek Village. It would be interesting to see the looks on the faces of the people in Lubbock when they showed up in their western duds driving Hummers sporting Mark-19's and Ma Deuces. When they parked the Hummers in front of the saloon about 3 hours later, Marshal Thomas was standing there to greet them with a smirk on his face.

"I presume you got your father and his companions to help you out?" Thomas said.

"There were over 400 Mexican gangsters there in Roswell, what did you expect us to do?" Josh asked.

"Just what you did," Thomas said, "When do I get to meet your father?"

"He's with the tanks on the west side of town, Marshal," Clarence replied. "We weren't sure if the people here in town could handle the shock of our pulling in with 4 Abrams tanks."

"They probably couldn't have handled it very well, I appreciate you not bringing the tanks into town," Thomas replied. "As it is, they're going to be talking about these Hummers for a couple of years at least. Did you bring the wagons back? I signed for them at the Livery Stable."

"They're on the HETS with the tanks," Josh replied. "My father is very anxious to meet you too, Marshal. He has a lot of questions and he's suggesting that you weren't completely honest with us."

"Smart man," Thomas said. "If I'd have told you that you were up against remnants of the Mexican Army over in Roswell would you have gone?"

"We aren't stupid, Marshal," Bobby announced, "Hell no, we wouldn't have gone. You've been playing us like a fiddle, just what's going on?"

"I'd prefer only having to tell the story once so how about we wait until I get to meet Derek?" Marshall suggested.

"You know my father's name?" Josh asked.

"My grandfather talked about him a few times," Marshall replied.

“Then let’s go and meet him so we can find out what is going on,” Bobby exclaimed.

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“You must be Derek,” Marshall said, “My name is Marshall Thomas and I was named after my grandfather who I believe your father knew.”

“We had 6 killed and more than a dozen injured cleaning up that mess in Roswell,” Derek cut to the chase. “Some of the things you told Josh and the others don’t make sense. Care to tell me what’s really going on?”

“We don’t really have a military and haven’t had much of one for years,” Marshall began. “There were a few that held on but they’ve gotten old, as you might imagine. The civilian government is back in place but it is just the remnants of the shadow government Bush maintained after the attack on the WTC back in 2001. The government is nearly powerless, if the truth were known. About 15 years after TSHTF, Mexicans invaded the southwestern US and took over New Mexico, Arizona and southern California. My father was appointed the US Marshal for Texas a few years back and I eventually took his place.”

“Adobe Creek Village has a reputation of being a place to leave alone, whether you realize it or not,” Marshall continued. “When I ran into these guys about my age, I put 2 and 2 together and decided that I could enlist the help of Adobe Creek Village to clean up Roswell. Hell, I had nothing to lose by asking and everything to gain if you succeeded. I had a hunch that when Josh, Clarence and Bobby saw what they were up against, they’d head for home and get your help. My grandfather told me you were a tanker in the Iowa National Guard. I see you’ve been down to Ft. Hood and picked up some Abrams. There’s plenty more where they came from and plenty of people who are willing to fight if they could get some decent training. We need your help Mr. Olsen and anything that we have is available for your use.”

“Who are we?” Derek asked.

“You have that small civilian government that needs all the help it can get,” Marshall explained. “We have US Marshals in about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the states. We’ve already selected Josh to be the US Marshal for Colorado if he’s still interested. Colorado will be divided into 2 districts, east and west and Bobby will run one and Clarence the other. Josh will be in overall charge of the state. I could give you a bunch of names of the people involved and I will, but I doubt you’ll recognize most of them. We just want to get the country back and then start to rebuild.”

“Where do I fit into this scheme?” Derek asked.

“You know armor, Mr. Olsen and we need someone to develop an armor force,” Marshall replied. “If you’ve been down at Ft. Hood, you’ve seen all the equipment and most of our supplies. It’s probably only a few Regiments of armor, but we have some artillery

and a former artillery Sergeant developing our artillery force even as we speak. As for Infantry, we have some old Marine Corp Gunny's to put together that group."

"What about ordnance?" Derek asked. "I wasn't sure those old tank shells would even fire."

"They're brand new," Marshall said. "We have some industrial facilities up and running, most producing military equipment and medical supplies. One pharmacy company has started back up and is producing drugs as fast as they can."

"You know son, I'm 60 years old and I was thinking about getting remarried," Derek replied slowly. "Why should I get involved in what you're planning?"

"Derek Spencer Olsen, veteran of Korea, Kosovo and blown up in Iraq, or am I wrong?" Marshall replied. "You just one of those natural sort of heroes, Mr. Olsen, you won't say no, your integrity won't let you."

"Let's imagine for a moment I said yes," Derek grinned. "Then what?"

"You'd be commissioned as an officer and be put in charge of assembling an armor force down at Ft. Hood," Marshall replied. "We already have a man to handle the actual training. His name is Bill Knowles and he says he knows you from Iowa and Iraq."

"I thought he was dead," Derek replied, dumbfounded. "He and I were the only 2 guys to survive that IED in Iraq."

"That's why we picked the 2 of you," Marshall said. "I hear that he's even more foolish than you."

"I'll have to talk to my family," Derek responded.

"Go ahead Dad," Josh urged. "DJ will be fine, especially once he gets some medicine to work with and Clarence, Bobby and I will be busy in Colorado, marshaling."

"What about getting some medical training for my other son?" Derek asked.

"We can put an old Navy corpsman in to cover his absence and send him to school," Marshall offered.

"Well, I suppose that James can run the village and I'm going to ask Brenda to marry me, so if I can have 30 days to get my affairs in order, the answer is yes," Derek agreed.

"I'll administer the oath of office General Olsen and I'll get your new ID and a new ID and badge for Josh," Marshall beamed. "Thank you sir."

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30 days later, Ft. Hood, TX...

General and Mrs. Derek Olsen arrived at Ft. Hood with very little fanfare. The single most important event of the day turned out to be when Derek and Bill got together. Bill had a present for Derek, his Rambo II knife and Explorer boot knife. They hadn't hooked up after Iraq and Bill had managed to recover the knives at the aid station before Derek had been flown to Germany. Bill couldn't help calling his old friend General Patton when he saw the ivory gripped 5½" Colt SAA. Derek had read all of Rommel and Patton's books so if they ever made a movie about what was about to happen, he could coin a line like, "Patton and *Rommel*, you magnificent SOB's I read your books!"

Derek had brought the 16 tankers he had trained and used in Roswell. Altogether, they had about 3,000 volunteers and retreads. They hung stripes or bars on the retreads and got busy with an abbreviated basic training program. They were allowing themselves 8 weeks to get the troops squared away and another 8 weeks for armor training. The training had formerly been conducted at Ft. Knox, Kentucky but they didn't have the manpower to offer the training in any other way than they were. When Derek arrived, his commission papers signed by the President of the US were waiting for him, officially commissioning him as a Brigadier General. Bill Knowles was also a Brigadier and maybe he could hold on to his star for more than a couple of weeks this time.

Colorado...

Considering the condition Denver and Colorado Springs were in, Josh elected to run the US Marshal's office out of Pueblo. Clarence would have eastern Colorado and would be based in Pueblo too. Bobby was assigned as the Chief Deputy US Marshal for western Colorado and they elected to have the office in Rifle on I-70. They borrowed the extra ham radio sets from Adobe Creek Village to maintain communications between the two offices and the Village. A couple of semis with lowboys had been dispatched to Roswell to recover any usable vehicles that the Mexican BG's had been using. Most of their vehicles were old diesel powered pickups running on biodiesel.

Over the course of the next few months, they began to recruit people to round out their staffs. Anyone with prior military experience was recruited, regardless of age. Not to criticize the previous approach of the military in training recruits, but they took a new approach. They still had to have discipline but that didn't mean they couldn't allow the recruits to think. In the armor Corps, discipline was emphasized slightly more than in the infantry because they'd be fighting what amounted to a guerilla war. Four months passed while they whipped their Regiments into something akin to the US military at its finest.

Their training included joint operations between the armor Regiments and the new improved Infantry. In the meantime, the civilians behind the preparations were churning out ordnance at an amazing rate. After nearly 30 years in the doldrums, the US was fi-

nally beginning to act like a nation once more. Manufacturing companies found themselves in a unique position where demand far exceeded supply. Consequently they were able to avoid competing with each other for the first time in the history of the nation. Each company was allocated products to produce depending upon their equipment, ability and supply of raw materials.

America was moving from the late 1800's into the twentieth century, and like the legendary Phoenix, it rose from the ashes. Early 20th century to be specific. The available power generation capacities were primarily diverted to the industrial sector. And, that tiny civilian government finally called for elections so they could have a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Every state was guaranteed 2 Senators by the Constitution, but they didn't have many more Representatives than Senators, so small was the population.

The available supply of gasoline was the E85 blend and the diesel fuel was the B-20 blend. Two factories were resurrected, one to produce solar panels and related equipment and a second to produce economical wind turbines. Before they could hold an election, the government needed a not so rough estimate of the population of the country. This duty fell to the US Marshals. The Three Amigos were nearly overwhelmed for a while counting heads in Colorado but they had the tally 3 months later. (That's why there is a census every 10 years.)

Overall, there was a shortage of vehicles and goods were being transported by rail to their destinations and delivered using trucks for the short hauls. Communications were a major problem because the EMP from the January 7, 2007 attack had fried 95% of the communication systems in the country. Some of the more complicated manufacturing processes had yet to reemerge. Recognizing that they couldn't have any sort of retail system without a medium of exchange, the government moved, even before the election, to reestablish the gold and silver standards. Money began to reappear slowly, but only in the form of coins.

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May 1, 2035, Ft. Hood, Texas...

"There's nothing more we can do to get ready for a war," Bill observed. "These troops are about as fine-tuned as they were before TSHTF. How many tanks do we have available?"

"Roughly 2,000 Bill," Derek replied. "All of the engines have been rebuilt and we have all the ordnance we're going to need."

"What about air support?" Bill asked.

"They managed to get about 200 Apache attack helicopters up and running and have 30mm ammo and Zuni rockets," Derek continued. "There's a shortage of the electronics

to rebuild the Hellfire missiles. What's available has been used to get up communications and the control systems for the choppers."

"How do we stand on logistics?" Bill asked.

"It could be better," Derek replied. "It's not that we're particularly short of the things we need, but transporting the matériel could be a problem."

"Do we have a battle plan?" Bill asked.

"We're going to cut a swath across New Mexico to I-25 and turn north and occupy Albuquerque," Derek explained. "Once we free up Albuquerque and Santa Fe, we'll divide our forces into 2 units and attack Arizona along I-10 and I-40."

"We have any intelligence to know what we're up against."

"I sent my vaqueros over into New Mexico and they organized some of those folks in Roswell. They've been scouting New Mexico and parts of Arizona for about 4 months. There's Mexican Army and armor in Albuquerque, Flagstaff, Phoenix and Tucson. I figure we'll put about 60 percent of our forces on the southern route once we free up Albuquerque."

"That's all well and good, hoss," Bill replied. "Thing is, a battle plan never survives the first shot being fired."

"Then we'll just improvise, adapt and overcome," Derek laughed.

"Where do I know that expression from?" Bill asked.

"It's a line out of one of my Dad's favorite movies, *Heartbreak Ridge*," Derek answered.

"How long has he been dead?" Bill asked. "Are we going to fight this thing using ghost warriors?"

"I forgot that you never met The Three Amigos," Derek replied. "That was my father and 2 of his friends, Ron Green and Clarence Rawlings. I suppose in a manner of speaking, they will be present at every battle we have. They were just 3 crusty old curmudgeons who loved to watch movies and apply the stories to real life. Hollywood never really captured what war is like, but every once in a while they'd generate a pearl of wisdom. Bill, we have to be flexible in our thinking to take out people who have been entrenched for 15 or more years."

A Present Time – Part III – Chapter Thirty Five – Recapturing the Country

Intelligence had revealed that attempts by the Mexicans to infiltrate Texas along its border with Mexico had been largely unsuccessful. There weren't a lot of targets in southern Texas for the Chinese and Russians to attack back in 2007 and most of the people had come through. Years later when the Mexicans began their invasion, armed ranchers and the citizens of Texas had held them at or near the border. Those Texans had been armed to the teeth and had fought the Mexicans to a virtual standstill. Bill wasn't satisfied with Derek's approach to the problem and they considered their alternatives. The final plan emerged that they would attack El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.

From there, they'd move north on I-10 and divide the forces when they hit the I-25/I-10 junction south of Las Cruces, NM. Bill's forces would support a holding operation covering Derek's back door while he moved north to capture Albuquerque and Santa Fe. After that campaign, they'd resupply and redistribute the remaining forces and pick up the plan that Derek envisioned. Deep inside, Derek had a fire burning ever since July 22, 2009 when Damon had been killed. The majority of the attackers on that day so long ago had been Hispanic. The rustler who'd shot Gary in the back on May 7, 2012 had spoken Spanish as his native language.

Vengeance is a dish best served cold. ~ Machiavelli

Derek wasn't any form of racist but he'd rather enjoyed wiping out those Mexican gangsters or whatever they were in Roswell. He was looking forward to evicting the Mexicans from the United States as well. That score was going to take a whole lot of settling as far as he was concerned. It was justice, family style. But, Bill and he had a problem called Ft. Bliss. North of El Paso, Ft. Bliss was the home of the American airborne defense training. This put them at odds with the Mexicans who had captured the fort and had much of the US's finest air defense assets including Patriot and Stinger missiles. This fact, alone, precluded the use of the Apache helicopters. Then there were the MLRS batteries, no doubt in the hands of the Mexican soldiers.

The question became 'how do you go up against some of the best weapon systems the US had ever devised with so few assets'. In the end, most wars become Infantry wars and in this case, that was how they were forced to begin. Those old Gunnery Sergeants hadn't trained these infantry folks to be Marines, per se; they were more like Force Recon with an attitude. They'd been taught the basics and then encouraged to improvise. By basics, they were taught a dozen ways to make improvised explosives and how to kill with anything from a knife to every arm in the inventory including the arms that had been captured from the Mexicans in Roswell. Their final exam would have made Green Berets proud to pass. The Green Berets had a 4 week exercise called Robin Sage at the end of their training.

They were able to field about half of those 2,000 tanks with the crews they had and their infantry force numbered about 3,500. If Sam Houston could capture Texas from Mexico in 1836 with as few men as he had, Derek and Bill figured they were ahead of the

game. They began to move their infantry in to recapture Ft. Bliss. Only then would they bring the tanks and the Apaches up. Fort Bliss is the largest installation in TRADOC (1.12 Million Acres), and the second largest in the Army (WSMR is the largest and is adjacent to Ft. Bliss). Ft. Bliss is the largest Maneuver Area in the Army, at 550 square miles, which is three times the size of the National Training Center (Ft. Irwin). It provides the largest contiguous tract of virtually unrestricted airspace in the Continental United States (1500 Square Miles).

Given the size of their infantry force, the soldiers would only be responsible for clearing a ½ section of ground apiece. They'd have backup in the form of artillery including the MLRS units from Ft. Hood. MLRS wouldn't do them much good if the Méxicans could manage counter fire so they started out in the Hummers and invaded the fort from the east. Their orders were to disable, not destroy. Bill and Derek wanted everything they could recover from Ft. Bliss and the White Sands Missile Range to be usable.

Derek didn't really anticipate they'd have any soldiers to deal with if they started at the furthest east point of Ft. Bliss and swept an arc across the northern part of the fort until they were line abreast and heading southwest to the main fort. The plan was nothing short of masterful. The tanks followed the mechanized infantry in their Hummers about 1 klick back followed by mortar squads and the artillery. They encountered no resistance when they swung the arc and started heading southwest. It was about the Texas line when they encountered the first of the Méxican Army. The infantry dismounted and the war began in earnest. Unfortunately...

The Méxican Army is at best an oxymoron and at its worst a bad joke. The total estimated members of the Méxican Air Force, Army and Navy was around 250,000 in 2005. The military was used primarily to suppress internal insurrections. The Clinton administration had funneled millions into the Méxican military during the 1990's in its war on drugs. Included among the weapons provided to the Méxicans were cattle prods. Maybe the Méxicans used the cattle prods to start their UH-1 choppers that we also provided.

During the 21st Century, Mexican soldiers had crossed the US border numerous times in hot pursuit of 'illegal immigrants' and drug traffickers. Why then, did they find it necessary to fire upon the US Border Patrol? The budget of the Méxican armed forces was about \$5 billion in 2004, less than 1% of the national budget. By comparison, the US spent \$371 billion not counting the extra money the Congress appropriated for the War on Terror, about 3.3% of the US budget.

Compare the economies of the two countries:

US:

The US has the largest and most technologically powerful economy in the world, with a per capita GDP of \$37,800. In this market-oriented economy, private individuals and business firms make most of the decisions, and the federal and state governments buy needed goods and services predominantly in the private marketplace. US business

firms enjoy considerably greater flexibility than their counterparts in Western Europe and Japan in decisions to expand capital plants, to lay off surplus workers, and to develop new products. At the same time, they face higher barriers to entry in their rivals' home markets than the barriers to entry of foreign firms in US markets. US firms are at or near the forefront in technological advances, especially in computers and in medical, aerospace, and military equipment; their advantage has narrowed since the end of World War II.

The onrush of technology largely explains the gradual development of a "two-tier labor market" in which those at the bottom lack the education and the professional/technical skills of those at the top and, more and more, fail to get comparable pay raises, health insurance coverage, and other benefits. Since 1975, practically all the gains in household income have gone to the top 20% of households. The years 1994-2000 witnessed solid increases in real output, low inflation rates, and a drop in unemployment to below 5%. The year 2001 saw the end of boom psychology and performance, with output increasing only 0.3% and unemployment and business failures rising substantially. The response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 showed the remarkable resilience of the economy.

Moderate recovery took place in 2002 with the GDP growth rate rising to 2.4%. A major short-term problem in first half 2002 was a sharp decline in the stock market, fueled in part by the exposure of dubious accounting practices in some major corporations. The war in March/April 2003 between a US-led coalition and Iraq shifted resources to the military. In 2003, growth in output and productivity and the recovery of the stock market to above 10,000 for the Dow Jones Industrial Average were promising signs. Unemployment stayed at the 6% level, however, and began to decline only at the end of the year. Long-term problems include inadequate investment in economic infrastructure, rapidly rising medical and pension costs of an aging population, sizable trade and budget deficits, and stagnation of family income in the lower economic groups.

México:

México has a free market economy with a mixture of modern and outmoded industry and agriculture, increasingly dominated by the private sector. Recent administrations have expanded competition in seaports, railroads, telecommunications, electricity generation, natural gas distribution, and airports. Per capita income is one-fourth that of the US; income distribution remains highly unequal. Trade with the US and Canada has tripled since the implementation of NAFTA in 1994. Real GDP growth was a weak -0.3% in 2001, 0.9% in 2002, and 1.2% in 2003, with the US slowdown the principal cause. México implemented free trade agreements with Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and the European Free Trade Area in 2001, putting more than 90% of trade under free trade agreements. The government is cognizant of the need to upgrade infrastructure, modernize the tax system and labor laws, and provide incentives to invest in the energy sector, but progress is slow.

Derek and Bill's troops pushed the Mexican Army like a wrangler pushing a herd of cattle. The Americans spent more time collecting discarded weapons than firing their own. The campaign, which was envisioned to last several weeks, was over in 5 days. The Americans didn't take any prisoners because they couldn't catch the Mexicans. They didn't leave a blocking force in El Paso and by the time they reached El Paso, the Mexicans were back across the border. They refueled, left a Company of tanks and an infantry Company in El Paso and headed up I-10 with Derek's tanks in the lead. Bill split his force of 700 tanks into two units and half followed Derek up I-10 and the remainder headed off cross country along the border to the west, dropping off ½ of a tank platoon and an infantry team every few miles.

At the Arizona state line, Bill halted this advance and waited for Derek's force to clear out Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Conventional military tactics dictate bypassing major cities and letting the follow on infantry force clear the area. And in an urban situation, tanks aren't the best way to fight a battle, a lesson the US Army had forgotten in Baghdad 30 years before.

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An Abrams tank burns 2½-gallons of fuel per mile. Bill had dispatched every available vehicle to resupply the tanks along the border. In late May, the area along the border was already getting warm and the units erected shelters against the sun and kept a bladder of spare fuel, extra shells and food and water. The guns on those tanks were pointed north, not south. Meanwhile when they reached Albuquerque, Derek's people found mostly ruins. He dispatched a tank company and 2 platoons of infantry to clear out Santa Fe and turned west on I-40. He, too, stopped at the Arizona state line.

Arizona is mostly rural. There are several small communities along I-40, but you don't really hit a large city on I-40 until you get to Flagstaff. From Flagstaff, the next major point of confrontation might be Needles on the California state line. In southern Arizona, I-10 splits off into I-10 and I-8 south of Phoenix. I-8 goes to California through Yuma and I-10 continues on into Phoenix where it turns west and hits California at Blythe. If you were to describe Arizona in a single word, that word might be desert. Bill and Derek got together in New Mexico at the junctions of US 191 and US 180 just a few miles outside of the town of Reserve.

"How's it going, hoss?" Bill asked Derek.

"Mostly we're just burning fuel," Derek replied. "What about you?"

"Well, I expect we'll run into resistance in Tucson," Bill explained. "I'd imagine that Phoenix wouldn't be any problem according to the Intel we have. They took several strikes and it's about like Albuquerque. Flagstaff ought to be interesting."

"That darned town sits on a mesa," Derek laughed. "We're just going to bull our way in and Take Names and Kick Butt."

“Maybe you ought to spin off a few units and do a run up to Lost Wages and rejoin your forces in Barstow,” Bill suggested. “I don’t think we’re going to run into much in California until you hit the Coachella Valley.”

“Why don’t you give me a Battalion of tanks and when I hit Barstow, I’ll send it west on 58 to Bakersfield?” Derek suggested.

“I can do that when we meet up in Phoenix,” Bill replied. “This didn’t turn out to be much of an invasion, did it?”

“Not yet, but we’ve mostly been in desert,” Derek commented. “I figure we’re going to have on hell of a fight on our hands once we get past the Mojave Desert.”

“I’m beginning to wonder what the point of this whole exercise is,” Bill suggested. “All we’ve done so far is burn up fuel and wear out tank treads. We could have fought this war on horseback.”

“Be careful what you wish for,” Derek replied.

“Huh?”

“It’s something The Three Amigos used to say,” Derek explained. “Be careful what you wish for, God has a sense of humor and may just give you what you want.”

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Derek blew through Flagstaff and waited in Phoenix while Bill fought an urban campaign in Tucson. They didn’t meet up again until about 3 weeks later in Phoenix. Bill’s southern force was still dropping off units to guard the border. Essentially the border was closed from Juárez to Nogales. They were advancing on San Luis Rio Colorado on the California state line just south of Yuma. Derek decided to send Bill’s borrowed Battalion up to Lost Wages and have them rejoin him in Barstow. Bill was going to pick up I-8 at Gila Bend and move west while Derek’s forces moved west on I-10 and I-40. The borrowed Battalion would run up 93 and continue on to Nevada.

Meanwhile, Marshall Thomas had traveled to Colorado and appointed Clarence the US Marshal of New Mexico and Bobby the US Marshal for Arizona. Some of the Army recruits had been diverted from the Army training at Ft. Hood and had been appointed as Deputy US Marshals. Clarence was told to establish his headquarters in Santa Fe and Bobby to set his up in Peoria, northwest of Phoenix. Despite using an essentially modern army to clear the Mexicans out of the southwest, Thomas bought each man a string of Morgan’s from Adobe Creek Village and explained that the US wasn’t returning to the age of technology quite yet.

"I don't know how well the 3 of you know your history," Marshall explained. "At the dawn of the 20th Century, the US was an interesting place. Most of the agricultural base used horsepower to till the land. America's first gasoline-powered automobile was the 1891 Lambert car invented by John W. Lambert. Just 1 in every 9,500 Americans owned an automobile in 1900. 40% were steam powered; 38% were electric; and just 22% were powered by gasoline burnt in an internal combustion engine. However, the telephone and telegraph were in widespread use around the country. The administration in Washington has a multifaceted goal of bringing the US back to the turn of the 20th Century."

"Until we are able to begin producing fuel in large quantities, the country is going to stick with the horse as the primary means of transportation," he continued. "When we do begin to produce fuel, most of it will be extracted from biomass, like the biodiesel and the E85 that the Army is using."

"How is the war with Mexico going?" Josh Asked.

"By the time that you get to your posts, New Mexico and Arizona will be secure," Thomas answered. "There hasn't been a lot of resistance so far, according to radio reports. Aside from the battle they waged to clear out Tucson, the next largest battle anyone had was when I sent you guys into Roswell."

"How many men do we get?" Bobby asked.

"26 apiece," Thomas answered. "You fellas have to realize that the census that was done showed that the population of the US was only about 25 million people. The areas you'll be responsible for will have very few people, it is mostly desert."

"Speaking of the administration," Josh said, "What's going on in Washington?"

"They basically threw out the US Code and started over, keeping those parts that made sense given our situation," Thomas replied. "With as little industry as the US has, pollution isn't much of a problem. The same thing goes with things that burn fuel, like automobiles. They're planning on restoring the hydroelectric and wind generated electricity and eliminating any source of power that produces pollution. The estimate I saw says it will take about 20 years to electrify the country."

"What's going to happen to my Dad and Bill?" Josh asked.

"Once they secure our borders, they'll retire and turn the military over to their able assistants," Marshall replied. "Congress designated their unit as the Tenth Calvary."

"That would make my grandpa very happy," Clarence chuckled.

"The US will maintain a small military along its borders to keep the country secure. However, except for that modern army to protect our borders, it will be up to the various states to develop their own militias to protect the states," he continued.

A Present Time – Part III – Chapter Thirty Six – California

“What now?” Derek asked.

“You start working your way across on I-40 and I’ll start working my way across on I-8,” Bill replied.

“Let me tell you what’s bothering me,” Derek said. “If we do that, it will leave the entire I-10 corridor open.”

“Derek, I don’t know what to tell you,” Bill replied. “I need all of my forces to cover the border and to move into San Diego. I already gave you 25 Platoons of tanks to hit Vegas. That leaves you with 37 Platoons on I-40 and 38 Platoons I-10. Once your forces join up in Barstow, you’ll have 62 Platoons there. You can spin off a dozen down I-15 to join up with the 38 on I-10.”

“How many Platoons do you have?” Derek asked.

“I’ll have to figure that out,” Bill replied. “I started out with 700 tanks or 175 Platoons. I gave you 25 so that has me down to 150. We’ve been dropping off a Platoon and 2 squads every 40 miles. Plus, I left that Company in El Paso. I’ve got 800 miles of land border with 1 tank every 10 miles. Deduct another 20, leaving 105. Then you can take off the five for the Company in El Paso. The way I see it we have 100 Platoons or 400 tanks apiece. Sorry, hoss, you’ll have to make do.”

“Can’t argue with your math,” Derek laughed. “Ok, that’s settled, now what?”

“Why don’t you drop off a Platoon and 2 squads every 40 miles like I’ve been doing,” Bill suggested. “When you get to Barstow, you can add up what you have and divide by 2. Send that many units down to Berdoo and head to the coast with the remainder, dropping them off like I said.”

“It’s about 140 miles between Needles and Barstow,” Derek said. “Figure about 3½ Platoons to cover that distance. From Barstow to the coast is 200 miles or 5½ Platoons. If I’m starting with 38 Platoons on I-10 and 62 minus 9 in Barstow, I’ll have 212 tanks left when I hit the coast.”

“Stop, I’m getting a headache,” Bill groused.

“You started it, so be quiet,” Derek laughed. “Start over. I have 152 tanks on I-10 and the other 248 will be somewhere along I-40 or something until I get to the coast. I can’t really get across the coastal range so I’ll send your 25 Platoons down I-15 into LA. You can join them there and I’ll meet up with you wherever.”

“Can you show me where wherever is on the map?” Bill asked.

“About an inch beneath your nose in the vicinity of your ass,” Derek replied.

“I got it,” Bill laughed. “Ok, I see your there in 3 weeks.”

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It started off well, but when Derek’s troops and tanks hit Berdoo, they ran into a brick wall. Freeway overpasses were down and bridges blown along I-10. They detoured south to I-60 and ran up against the same thing. They called up to Barstow and Derek routed the folks from Vegas down I-15 where they hit another brick wall in the form of more downed overpasses and blown bridges. Derek told them to all head back north and they’d take I-14 down to LA. Meanwhile, Bill wasn’t getting any resistance and was in San Diego in nothing flat. He spit his force and sent half up I-15 and the remainder up I-5 to LA.

“I-10 to northern command,” Derek heard.

“Go ahead I-10,” Derek replied.

“We have a relay from San Diego and the General split his force,” the reply came.

“We’re going to figure something out here and be waiting when they arrive from San Diego.”

“10-4, advise I-15 to do the same and the rest of us will come down 14,” Derek replied.

“Wilco, out.”

Wilco? Where in the hell did that guy come from? Oh, he was one of those really old ones. Hell of a tanker once someone helped him into the tank. What can I tell you, they kicked butts and took names, all Hispanic names. They would be remembered as the battles of San Bernardino and Los Angeles. When the dust settled 3 weeks later, they were out of canister rounds for the tanks and had completely exhausted their supplies of .50 cal and 7.62mm machinegun ammo. They estimated that the population of Mexico dropped by 15-20 million.

Or, maybe they had that wrong, maybe Mexico had already subtracted those people before they did their last census. Maybe the real population of Mexico was 125 million and they just counted their citizens north and south of the border. Who is to say? They took those remaining tanks back down to the border and in the 800 miles from San Diego, to El Paso; they dropped off a tank at the rate of one per mile. Remember, they still had another 1,000 tanks back at Ft. Hood. So they left the tanks and took the crews and ordnance. Let those Mexicans worry about those tanks for 20 years.

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July 4, 2036, Adobe Creek Village, CO...

“Next year will be the 30th anniversary of the day the world ended,” Derek remarked to Bill.

“We really appreciate you inviting us to move to Colorado, hoss,” Bill grinned. “You know, the way the world was going 30 years ago, maybe the Russians and Chinese did us a favor.”

“What do you mean by that, billions of people died?” Derek pointed out.

“True, but we have the cream of the crop left in this country, don’t we?” Bill replied. “Do you remember telling me how your Dad always wanted to go back to the 1950’s?”

“He really did you know,” Derek replied. “What about it?”

“This country is a lot like it was just before WW II started,” Bill explained. “The only difference has to do with who is the big power these days. I don’t know who that is, but it sure ain’t us.”

“To absent friends,” Derek raised his glass...

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